Lieutenant Barnabas

FRANK BARRETT

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS.

A NOVEL.

BY

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IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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CONTENTS

OF

THE FIRST VOLUME.

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	A Rogue and a Fool	1
II.	At The "Black Boy"	11
III.	Dr. Blandly	28
IV.	Brothers	45
V.	The First View	61
VI.	On the Coach	75
VII.	From Edmonton to Winchmore	92
VIII.	At "The Chesnuts."	107
IX.	Night and Morning	122
X.	A Visit	146
XI.	Oil and Vinegar	162
XII.	Counsels	178
XIII.	Premonitory Symptoms	198
XIV.	"The Best Laid Schemes"	217
XV.	The Establishment in Park Lane	237
XVI.	Tom Proposes—Lady Betty Disposes	246
XVII.	Gerard Crewe	260
XVIII.	Soucie et Sans Soucie.	276
XIX.	The Invitatton	289
XX.	Who Should Wear a Diadem but She	305

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS.

CHAPTER I.

A ROGUE AND A FOOL.

A KNIGHT-ERRANT and his Squire rode along the Green Lanes, Hornsey. The Knight had a face deeply pitted with small-pox, a short nose, a square jaw, a straight mouth, high cheekbones, large ears, and eyes so close together that they were of necessity unusually small. He wore a mangy beaver hat with a military cockade,

a bob-wig, a long coat with a cape, and a pair of riding-boots. There had been a hard frost for four days, nevertheless coat and boots were plentifully bespattered with dry mud; and their dilapidation was such that they looked better with mud upon them than without.

He had the facial expression of an old man—a cunning old man, who has seen all that there is to be seen of the worst side of life; but he sat in the saddle like a young man, and whistled an Irish air with lively turns in a jaunty and youthful style.

He whistled, not for want of thought, but because his reflections were of a speculative, agreeable sort.

He was a knight, not in the old chivalric sense, but by reason that his life was devoted to adventure. He was not in the Green Lanes to redress the wrongs of suffering virtue, to help the weak, to relieve

the oppressed; far from it. He had no sympathy with virtue; if he were lucky enough to meet with an unprotected lady he would pick her pocket, and if anything were to be got out of the weak and the oppressed, he would get it.

The squire was of quite a different kind of man; a stout, young fellow of eighteen or twenty, with hair of an honest red, and a face turned out of Nature's simplest mould—a face broad and expansive, with no undercut, and which one might model pretty easily by making a few indentations on the surface of a round Dutch cheese; he wore a long livery coat, sound boots, and a hat worth, say, about forty of his master's. The horse he bestrode was an excellent animal, whereas the knight's was as sorry a flea-bitten grey as ever shambled along the road, and habitually carried his head down in dejection, as if looking with sorrow

upon the abnormal proportions of his knees.

The squire did not whistle; indeed, he looked as miserable as if he were already on the road to Tyburn, and occasionally he opened his mouth to let a sigh escape. Beyond the fact that he had accepted service under the knight, there was no point of resemblance between him and the ancient squires. He had no reverence for his master, except such as arose from fear, and he had no taste for the profession he had adopted. The experience of twenty-four hours had completely changed the colour of his views, and he heartily wished that he had never been born. He trotted along about fifty yards behind his master—a distance he would fain have increased but that the knight occasionally turned in his saddle to see how he got on, and constantly kept one hand under his cloak on his pistol holster.

They had passed Wood Green, and the grey tower of Hornsey Church could be seen above the red-brown branches of the intervening trees, when the squire drew up to his master, and spoke.

"Here be another 'pike, master," he said.

"You may go on in front and pay."

"Please, your worship, I can't."

"What, disobedient already! Can't pay —how's this?"

"It's beca'se I haven't any money, for I spent the last of the crown-piece you gave me for myself to pay for your honour's bread and cheese and ale at the 'Jolly Butchers'; and so being, my money's all gone, I haven't any left."

"Hum! Here take this shilling, pay the toll and keep the change."

"It's something to serve a generous master," said the squire to himself, as he trotted forward to the toll-gate; "that

makes six shillings he's given me for myself to-day; if I had not to spend it I should get rich quickly at this rate."

"Is there ever a good inn along this road, where a gentleman can put up for the night?" asked the knight of the toll-keeper.

The toll-keeper was a heavy-eyed, phlegmatic man: he looked at the knight from head to foot, keeping his hands in the pockets of his short apron, and turning over his money before he answered.

"There's a house good enough for you about a mile furder on. 'The Black Boy,' West Green—keep to your left," he said.

The knight dug his heels viciously in the ribs of his horse, and made a sign to his squire, who stood by the gate waiting to take his place in his master's rear, to come to his side.

"We are getting near London, and I

don't know the inns hereabouts, so you will have to be careful," said he.

"Yes, your worship."

"In the first place, you must drop that habit of addressing me as your worship. I have told you my name a dozen times, Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe."

"Lieutenant is such a long name to remember; I could think of captain, if it's all the same to you."

"Captain won't do. Every rascal on the road calls himself captain now. I don't mind your calling me 'your honour.'"

"I can recollect that, beca'se Justice Thornton is always called your honour, and I can think of nothing but the bench of magistrates since I stole this horse."

"Haven't I told you that you didn't steal the horse? The horse was given you when you entered Admiral Talbot's service, and so in leaving it you were justified

in taking the horse with you. That's plain ain't it."

"It would be right enough if everyone looked at the thing as generously as your honour; but you see, all folks haven't got the same way of giving and taking, and if Master Blake the steward caught sight of me, I wager he'd have me hanged for not thinking as he does."

"Well, my lad, just to ease your mind, we'll change horses at once. You can ride my mare with a light heart, for you may be certain no one will accuse you of having stolen her. It's as good as giving you ten guineas, my man," he said, as he dismounted and handed the rein over to his servant, "I've had as much offered for her again and again."

"That makes ten guineas and six shillings in one day," said the squire to himself; "why that's more than some servants gets in a year."

"I wonder I didn't think of that before," thought Lieutenant Barnabas. "He looks more like my servant on the old mare, and there's less chance of his giving me the slip. I could run him down in five minutes on this horse." Turning to his servant, he surveyed him with satisfaction, and then said: "And now about your name."

"Tobias Slink, your honour. Toby for short."

"Tobias won't do. Toby is too familiar. Slink—well, there's a sneaking sort of sound about that, but Slink must do. Now, Slink, if anyone at the inn we're going to asks questions about me, you must say I am Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe, late of the Royal Blues; that I sold out upon coming into my present estate, which is situated in Ireland—Crewe Castle, County Cork. No, you'd better say Munster, that's not so well known—that

I think of settling in England, and am looking about for a suitable seat."

"Your honour had better write that down, for I shall never remember it all. I was always back'ard in learning."

"On second thoughts, it would be advisable to give an evasive answer."

"What's that, your honour!"

"You can give indirect replies—and intimate that I am a nobleman wishing to travel *incog.*"

"*Incog.* Is that in Ireland too, your honour?"

"No, fool! Look here; if anyone says to you, 'Who's your master?' you can answer, 'He's a nobleman travelling in disguise, and I can tell you no more than that.' Now do you understand that?"

"Oh, if its only telling lies, I understand well enough."

"Very well. Now fall back, for I see the sign-board of the inn."

CHAPTER II.

AT THE "BLACK BOY."

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS CREWE trotted into the stable-yard of the "Black Boy," followed by his servant, and having seen his newly-acquired horse well stabled, and given instructions to Slink relative to the feed, he cocked his dilapidated beaver rakishly over one eye, and marched into the sanded passage of the inn, smacking his leg with his riding-whip, and looking about him with an assumption of arro-

gant authority, calculated, as he thought, to inspire respect.

"Your best room, madam, if you please, and what can I have for dinner?" he asked, still smacking his boot, and looking at the landlady fiercely from under the corner of his beaver.

The hostess, a fat widow, with a healthy face and short ringlets projecting from the front of her cap, carefully set her glasses on her nose, and then looked at her interrogator critically before responding. It was annoying to be examined in this manner, but Lieutenant Barnabas was accustomed to it. Everyone looked at him thus before replying to his first questions.

"Ah!" she said, taking off her glasses and putting them in her pocket. "The best room for you is the parlour. And as for dinner, there's no butcher's meat in the house, so you must make shift with

eggs and bacon, if you choose to stop here."

"It would seem that you are not in the habit of seeing gentlemen at your house, madam."

"Oh, we see as many of your kind as we want, thank you, Sir," replied the hostess, tartly.

Without replying, the Lieutenant swaggered into the parlour. There he stirred the fire, piled more coals on the back, drew a Windsor chair well in front, seated himself, stuck his feet on the hobs, and then having with some difficulty determined which was the top and which was the bottom of a newspaper, pretended to be deeply engrossed in its contents when the hostess came in to lay the cloth.

"Will your companion dine with you?" she asked.

"My servant will dine in the kitchen;

and I will trouble you to bring candles, and light a fire in your best bedroom."

"Are you going to stay all night? London is only five miles off."

"It pleases me to stay here, madam," replied Lieutenant Barnabas, turning his chair to give his hostess the full benefit of his frown. He refolded his paper, still looking at her, then returned to a deep study of the news, blessedly unconscious that the paper had got upside down.

"Hum!" murmured the hostess as she left the room. "Four o'clock, and bright weather—a strange time for a gentleman keeping a servant to put up at a small village inn so near London."

The old hostler was breaking the ice in the horse-trough in front of the house, she opened the half-door and beckoned him.

"Billy, is the stable closed?" she asked.

"No, marm. Young chap's a-grooming the hosses down."

"You go round there at once, and when the young man's done, lock the door and bring me the key; and don't you let those horses be taken out until I tell you the bill's paid."

These words coming to the capacious ears of the studious lieutenant, he snatched his wig off and dashed it on the floor, with an oath—"not loud, but deep."

Slink groomed his horses, and forgot his sorrows in the pleasure of his occupation. The stolen horse he got away from as quickly as possible—it wanted little grooming, and despite his master's assurances, he felt uneasy every time he touched the beast; but the horse that had been presented to him, required more attention.

"It'll take a sight of brushing to make you look worth ten guineas," he murmured, and then he hissed as grooms do, and rubbed the wretched nag with all his strength, until nothing more could be done to improve appearances. Afterwards he washed himself in a bucket of water, reduced his shock of hair to smoothness by means of a wet mane-comb, and betook himself to the kitchen, where he sat by the fire-side in his shirt sleeves, and gave himself up to silent meditation. The kitchen-maid, who was cooking the eggs and bacon, did not disturb him—she was deaf and busy; so he sat there with his hands on his knees looking into the fire, where he conjured up the saucy face of the girl who had won his heart by her kindness, and then driven him away from her by cruelty.

To say that he frequently heaved a sigh would be less correct than to say that a

sigh frequently heaved him, for on these occasions his whole frame expanded, his body rose, the gusty sigh came from his parted lips, and then he subsided into his normal condition.

"What's the matter, young man—are you hungry?" asked the cook, her attention at length attracted by these signs of distress.

Slink nodded; the natural cravings of nature were not yet removed by love.

"Well, you can draw up your chair to the table and begin. Your master's served, and this is for you. There's a mug of beer, and if you want more you can go up to the bar and ask for it. I'm going up to light a fire in your master's bedroom."

Slink cut himself a huge slice of bread and attacked the food with avidity, and did not pause until he had wiped the dish clean with the last crust of his half-

quartern loaf; then he turned again to the fire, taking with him his brown mug of ale, and resumed his melancholy contemplations, sighing and drinking in fitful alternation, until the beer was all gone, when he set aside the empty mug, rested his arm against the chimney-piece and his face upon that, and gave vent to his sorrow in copious tears. He was weeping thus when the kitchen-maid returned.

"Haven't you had enough to eat?" she asked, in a tone of sympathy.

"It isn't the victuals, it's my heart," sobbed Slink.

The words were indistinct, and she was deaf; but she divined the cause of his wretchedness accurately enough. For what woman needs more explanation than a man carries in his face, as to the state of his heart. Love is the study of her life, and she detects at a glance the types of its votaries, as a

naturalist knows by a single bone the physical aspect of the creature that possessed it.

"Never mind, young man!" said she. "It comes to all of us, cooks and grooms, just as it comes to lords and ladies, to fall in love, and to laugh, and then weep. Dry your eyes, lad, and run up-stairs, your master has sent for you."

Slink ran up-stairs, rubbing his eyes with his sleeve, and, touching his forelock to the hostess, entered the parlour.

Lieutenant Barnabas had resumed his place before the fire—his feet on the hob, his chair tilted back, a long clay pipe in his mouth, and his wig over his eyes, so that the tie stood out from the back of his head, exposing the lower part of his shaven skull.

"Is that you, Slink?" he asked, without changing his position.

"Yes, your honour." Slink was content that his master did not see his face.

"Open the door sharp, and see if that old cat of a hostess has got her ear at the keyhole."

"No one there, your honour," said Slink, having opened the door and looked at the keyhole.

"I want you to tell me about your late master, and the family, and all that."

Slink gasped a sigh. "You want me to tell you why I left—and all about Jenny."

"Hang Jenny—we had all about her yesterday. I see I must cross-question you as if you were in the dock. Now then—how long have you been at Talbot Hall?"

"Four years come Christmas, I went—"

"Admiral Talbot resided at the Hall, then?"

"Him and Mr. Thomas—I was ——"

"Mr. Thomas was the Admiral's only son?"

"I think so."

"You think so,"—the Lieutenant turned hastily and spoke with eagerness. "You only think so—why do you think so?"

"Because he hadn't got any other."

"A fool! How old was Mr. Thomas Talbot?"

"Never axed him, your honour."

"How old do you think he was? plague take you."

Slink considered for some time, and then said he thought about eight and twenty.

"He does not stay at Talbot Hall?"

"No, he is always travelling in foreign parts; sometimes London, sometimes Cambridge, and such like. He comes to the Hall for a few days to shoot pheasants and things, and off he goes again. It was just the same with his father. He'd send word a couple of days befor emaybe to have a couple of rooms got ready, and then ——"

"There was never anyone constantly living in the Hall, no women?"

"Oh! yes, there was."

Again the Lieutenant turned quickly, saying:

"You never said a word of that before, what kind of women?"

"The prettiest that ever lived, and her name is,"—with a sigh that made the candles flicker—"Jenny!"

The Lieutenant bit an inch off his pipe stem and dropped a few oaths.

"You told me yesterday that Doctor Blandly came to the Hall to tell the steward of Admiral Talbot's death, when was that?"

"Yesterday."

"I mean, when did Doctor Blandly come to Talbot Hall, with that news?"

"Two months ago," answered Slink, after performing an arithmetical calculation with his fingers.

The Lieutenant finished his pipe without putting further questions.

"It is something more than a mere coincidence" he muttered, as he rose and threw his pipe on the fire.

"What did your honour say?" asked Slink.

"Nothing. You never heard the steward, or the Admiral, or Mr. Thomas Talbot, or anyone, ever mention anything about the Crewes?"

"I never heard the old Admiral talk about anything else."

"What!" exclaimed Barnabas, suddenly arresting his hands in the act of setting his wig straight. "You never mentioned a word of that, what did he say? quick!"

"He said such a lot," answered Slink, confused by his master's manner, "sometimes he'd say 'we've had a plaguey bad cruise,' and sometimes he'd say— —"

"Oh! go to the ——. Fetch me my cloak and hat!" he growled.

Slink brought the cloak in silence, without attempting to fathom his master's petulance.

The Lieutenant stood before the glass arranging the ragged lace of his cravat, to hide its worst edges and conceal the dirty shirt beneath.

"Snuff the candle," he said. "This confounded light makes me look as if I'd had a barker blazed in my face."

As Slink extended his hand to take the snuff from the candles, the Lieutenant caught sight of his clean stout shirt.

"That's a good shirt, Slink," he said, taking a part of the sleeve in his fingers to feel the texture; "did you buy it yourself?"

"No, your honour; shirts was given me with my livery."

"Like the mare, eh? Ah, Slink, you

won't get the magistrates out of your mind while you wear that!"

"I ha'n't got no other."

"Well, we must arrange that for you, my good fellow; I will give you one of mine—the one I've got on my back. You leave yours in my room to-night—and those boots, Slink!"

"They're just the same as the mare, your honour," Slink whimpered.

"Don't snivel, my lad. Your foot looks about the same size as mine, and I'll give you mine rather than you shall go without. Off with them. What, do you wear socks, Slink? You will find my boots more comfortable without any, that's why I haven't worn them, but with yours it will be different. Pull them off."

"There's my coat and hat downstairs, perhaps your worship wouldn't mind taking them."

"No, Slink; you must wear them your-

self; and don't override the willing horse, my man. I've given you a horse and the best part of a suit of clothes. Don't ask for more!"

Slink, painfully conscious of his own ingratitude, blushed as he helped the Lieutenant put on his coat.

"You can sit here in my absence," said Barnabas, "and if the old woman asks any questions, you know how to answer her. You can have whatever you like to call for." He cocked his hat on one side of his head, took his heavy-handled riding-whip, and opening the door, added, "I'm going out for a stroll. Pish! what a stench of stale beer." Then with a fierce glance at the hostess, who was sitting at the door of the bar-parlour with her knitting on her lap, he strolled leisurely out into the open air.

"Ah, you wouldn't go a-foot, if you could get at your horse, I'll warrant,"

soliloquised the hostess, looking after her ill-favoured guest.

She was quite right in this conjecture.

CHAPTER III.

DR. BLANDLY.

LIEUTENANT BARNABAS lounged along idly until he had passed the little general shop which marked the end of the village, then he pulled up his collar, set his hat firmly on his head, and smartened his pace. Ten minutes brisk walking brought him to the end of Black Cap Lane, and into the high road opposite the cluster of trees known as the "seven sisters;" here he turned to the left, and continued his "stroll," passing Tottenham Cross, Lower

Tottenham, and Upper Edmonton with undiminished speed until he reached the "Bell" Inn, where he paused to recover his breath and wipe the perspiration from his face. Five minutes later he rang the bell at the garden-gate of Dr. Blandly's house.

"No light to be seen," he muttered, looking over the gate at the house which stood back behind a large cedar. "He can't be in bed yet awhile, it has only just gone seven; yet he's such a queer old put. Ah, thank goodness, there's a light."

A bent old man came from the house, and opening the little square door behind a grating let into the gate, peered through.

"You needn't be afraid, Jerry, it's only your young friend. Is your master at home?" said the Lieutenant, who spoke civilly to no one unless he was obliged.

"Ah!" grunted Jerry, who evidently recognised the speaker, "if it's only you you can wait there while I go and see if master be at home." He closed the grating and walked slowly back to the house, chuckling audibly in response to the curses of the gentleman on the other side of the gate. The old servant scraped his shoes carefully, closed the door, and rubbed his feet on the mat in the same methodical manner, stopped in his passage across the hall to see what the time was by the dark-faced, long-bodied clock, and finally tapped at the door of Doctor Blandly's sitting-room.

"Come in," said the Doctor; "fifteen two, fifteen four, a pair's six, and jack, queen, king—that makes nine. Is that you, Jerry?"

"Yes, master; shall I wait till the game's finished?"

"What do you want?"

Jerry stood by the door; a screen stood between him and Doctor Blandly. He stepped forward to the side of this screen and stood there, smiling blandly on the comfortable tableau before him, while Doctor Blandly continued to count his "crib."

A sea-coal fire was blazing cheerily up the chimney. A dog sat behind the high brass fender, with his muzzle resting on the top. Between the fire and the folding screen which shut out the darkness and cold draughts, a card-table was set. On one side of it sat Doctor Blandly, pegging his score on the cribbage-board; opposite him sat the Reverend John Baxter, with a churchwarden pipe in his mouth, and a stern eye fixed on the Doctor's pegging. A kettle sang merrily on the fire, and its purpose was betrayed in a couple of steaming rummers set within reach of the players upon brackets adjutting from the side of

the fire-place. The Reverend John Baxter, Vicar of Edmonton, wore his clerical dress and bands; Dr. Blandly wore a plum-coloured coat, a long, embroidered waistcoat, a snowy shirt frill and neck-handkerchief, knee-breeches, and thick, grey knitted stockings. Both were comfortably fat and red; the vicar had a jolly cheeriness upon his pleasant face, as, indeed, at this moment, Dr. Blandly had also, but it had not the same expression of habitual content and sleepy satisfaction.

"Well, Jerry, what is it?" said Doctor Blandly, looking up.

"You look so comfortable and cosy, master, I don't like to disturb you. Shall I come again in five minutes? It'll do him good to wait."

"Him! Who?"

"It's only that there Mr. Barnabas Crewe. He's not in the house, Sir."

A loud ring of the distant bell added confirmation to this announcement.

"Show Mr. Crewe into the library, Jerry."

"When you've finished your game, Sir?"

"No; now. The Vicar threatens to go after this game, and I know he won't before, for I have not turned the corner yet, and it is his crib next time."

"Well done, Doctor; and it's past seven," chuckled Jerry, leaving the room.

"That Jerry makes himself too familiar, Blandly," said the Vicar. "Dear me, past seven! Mrs. Baxter will be growing anxious."

"I'll warrant she's not half so anxious as you are, Jack. I declare that when the clock strikes seven you look as if the Day of Judgment was dawning."

"Ben! Ben! I'll give you a sermon next Sunday upon profanity!"

"Do, Jack; and I promise to keep awake if you can invent any greater punishment for the wicked than that of having a scolding wife and faint heart."

"Faint heart, Ben, what do you mean? Do you think I'm afraid of Mrs. Baxter?"

"I'd give my best punch-bowl to hear you tell her you're not. If your sermons were only half as powerful as hers, what a well-ordered congregation you would have."

"Ah, Ben, you're not married!"

"Thank Heaven!"

"But you're as big a fool as I am."

"That's saying a great deal."

"Let me speak. I contend that you are every bit as weak as I am. Grant that I—that I—well, that I yield to the wishes of my wife——"

"Oh, that's beyond dispute."

"You dare not listen to me, knowing

what evidence I can bring to convict you of the fault for which you condemn me. I may yield to my wife, but you yield to everyone."

"You must admit that I only give way where I see something to admire."

"Hem! that's a dig at Mrs. Baxter; thank you! Tell me what you see to admire in old Jerry, for you submit to his guidance entirely. If he tells you to go fishing for the day you go, though you catch nothing but a cold, and have to stop in bed all the next day by your servant's orders. He talks to you as though he were your equal."

"And so, by George! he is. A more faithful, honest, good-hearted man never breathed. Not a word against Jerry, Jack, for I love him, and he doesn't take me away from my friend at seven o'clock."

"I find fault with you, not with Jerry;

though I admit his charms are less apparent to my eyes than to yours."

"If you appreciated charms with my eyes, you would have more reason for self-congratulation; there would be no Mrs. John Baxter."

"You would have me believe that you were always a woman-hater, but you won't succeed. I believe that you are not married just because at one time you loved too well."

A kitten was sleeping on the Doctor's broad knee; he lifted it gently and put it on the rug, rising from his chair without replying to the Vicar. The genial smile passed away from his face for a moment, as the old wound bled under the rough touch. The Vicar, inhaling the fragrant steam of his grog, noticed only the silence, and continued in a tone of triumph:

"Ha! ha! I've hit this time! It's clear now why you think all women mean,

cunning, deceitful; you have trusted and been deceived."

The Doctor, drowning his old memory in the remainder of his grog, set down the empty glass, and with his former cheerfulness responded:

"If your conjecture is right, I have still the advantage over you, Jack. Say that I awoke one day to the fact that the woman was a fiend whom I had foolishly taken for an angel, one thing is certain——"

"Well?"

"I did not marry her beforehand."

With this Parthian shot the Doctor left the room.

There was a solitary candle alight in the library, where Barnabas Crewe walked up and down impatiently, while at the door sat old Jerry with a grim smile of satisfaction on his face. The Doctor dismissed the janitor with a nod, entered

the library, and closing the door behind him, said in a cold, formal tone:

"Now, Mr. Crewe, what do you want with me?"

Barnabas regarded the sturdy Doctor, who stood with his feet parted, his hands in his pockets, and a stern unflinching expression in his face, as he might have looked at a constable while determining whether he should show fight or bolt, and then he growled in sullen remonstrance:

"I've been waiting, outside and in, half-an-hour and more."

"For your own convenience, I suppose. No one asked you to come, or requested you to stop. What do you want?"

"Money."

"You might have saved yourself the trouble of coming to me for it; I have none for you."

"But I must have it. There's my horse locked up in an inn stable at West-

Green, and I can't get it out until I have payed my score."

"Then you must do without a horse, or get a friend to help you; I am none."

"You will let me have a few guineas?"

"Not a farthing. I gave you fifty pounds in September."

"And it was gone in October."

"You should have guarded it better. I constantly warned you that the allowance might be discontinued."

"A deal of difference that makes to me! When I have money I spend it like a—like a gentleman."

"It is a pity you do not sustain that character in other respects. However, that is not to the point. You came here six weeks ago for money, and you did not get it; you will get none to-night."

"It is December now, the next fifty will be due on the 25th; I only ask for an advance."

"I told you when you were last here that the individual who has made you this quarterly allowance, no longer lives; and that the continuance of the payment depended upon the generosity of his son."

"And is the son disposed to be generous?"

"I cannot say. I hope to know his decision before the quarter day."

"Will you tell me why this money is paid me?"

"No." The Doctor spoke with emphasis.

"Supposing this money is mine by right, and supposing I choose to take my fortune in a lump, instead of having to come here like a beggarly tax-collector to take a fourth of my income every three months."

"Well?"

"And supposing I know from whom I

have received this money." Barnabas fixed his eyes on the Doctor to see what impression his words made. "And supposing I went to a certain hall, not ten miles from Sevenoaks in Kent" —the Doctor started, and Barnabas, satisfied with his observation, continued: "and asked Mr. Talbot the question I have put to you—what would be the result?"

"Mr. Talbot would say to you, 'I know nothing about it.'"

"Know nothing about it, when he pays me two hundred a year!"

"Exactly so."

"But you know Mr. Talbot—it's no good denying that—Mr. Thomas Talbot, son of Admiral Talbot."

"Who was killed in the battle off Cadiz. Certainly. Now listen. If you go to Mr. Talbot he will say, 'I know nothing about it—you must ask Dr. Blandly,' and when

you come to me, I shall say, 'I will give you not another farthing so long as you live.' Do you understand me? I will make it clear to you. I desire that you shall never speak to Mr. Thomas Talbot. While you conform with my wishes in this respect, I will continue the payment of two hundred pounds per annum to you and your brother Gerard, supposing that Mr. Talbot consents to pay the sum granted by his father; but the moment I find you have departed from this condition, I shall stop the payment. Is that plain to you?"

"Do you mean to say that it is optional to you?"

"I do. So now, Mr. Crewe, you will see that your policy is to behave yourself decently. I do not suppose that you understand what gratitude is, or I would point out to you that you have reason to be thankful you have not an ordinary man of law to deal with. There are few men

who would take the trouble I am taking to secure you two hundred a year after receiving such impudence as I have endured."

With the bad grace of a hound who swallows an unsavoury morsel, fearing the consequences of refusal, Barnabas Crewe gulped down the moral of this lesson and departed. He refrained from cursing the old servant who let him out, and turned moodily to return to the "Black Boy."

He felt no gratitude towards anyone in the world, but at the same time he was not disappointed with the result of his visit to Doctor Blandly. He had assured himself of a fact which might serve as the stepping-stone to fortune; there was the hope of many things—money, ease, orgies.

Coming into the warm glow of light shed from the window of "The Bell," he paused. Walking and subsequent talking

had made him dry; waiting had also made him cold. Never in his life had he felt more inclined to drink hot spiced ale; but not a penny-piece could he find in any of his pockets, he had given his last coin to Slink. So he was compelled to make the long return march—thirsty, which he took as a warning to be less generous in future.

CHAPTER IV.

BROTHERS.

WEST GREEN is now a busy settlement, with a railway station in its midst. Possibly it has lost even its name. At the beginning of this century it was a quiet rustic village on the edge of a pleasant green, where geese fed in the summer morning, and young fellows met to play cricket and quoits in the evening. In one corner stood a village pump, the village stocks, and the cage just where Black Cap Lane made a junction with Throttle Street—significant names, which

the builders of genteel villas have euphemised considerably.

The stocks were in good repair, and the cage had lately received a new set of stout bars. These facts were noted by Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe as he returned to the "Black Boy," for he stopped by the pump to refresh himself, and were remembered the following morning when he came to consider what was next to be done.

"I'm not afraid of the old hostler, and I'm not afraid of the old woman," he reflected, shoving his chair from the breakfast table. "When Slink goes to feed the nags we might clap the saddles on and bolt; that's the simplest way out of the difficulty. But there's a baker o' one side and a blacksmith t'other—and there's that cage and the stocks on the green. I'll warrant the old woman's on good terms with her neighbours. She's

outside talking to someone now. Wonder who? Oh, there you are, you old tabby, are you; talking to two men, and one as like a constable as needs be. Bolting won't do with these gentry about. Might take the mare and leave Slink here with the old screw; but I shouldn't get anything by that bargain. Besides, I don't want to lose my young friend Slink yet awhile. He may be a plaguey good cat's-paw for me. Halloa, a man on a horse to add to the party, and he looks as much like a cursed catch-thief as the other. It would be pleasant to sit in the stocks a day like this! I must pay my reckoning somehow. I wonder if Gerard's in town. I must go and see; it's my only chance. Shall I attempt to get the mare out? Ten to one she'd refuse to let either leave the house until her bill's paid. Better not try; it might lead to unpleasant consequences."

The result of this decision was that Lieutenant Crewe presently lounged out of the inn to take another stroll. After walking from one end of the village to the other with affected carelessness, he turned down Hanger Lane leisurely, whistling a tune and slashing the air with his whip. At the bend of the lane he turned round, and seeing no one, at once ceased whistling and strode out rapidly. From Hanger Lane he turned into the West-end Road, passed Hornsey Wood, and so after an hour's stiff walking he came to Charing Cross. Thence he walked to St. James's, and at length arrested his steps before a highly-respectable private house in St. James's Street.

"There's a dry march and violence to follow if Gerard's not at home," he muttered, as he pulled the bell.

A servant opened the door.

"Is Mr. Gerard Crewe in town?" asked Barnabas.

The man looked at him from top to toe, and then asked:

"What do you want?"

"Want to see him. If he's in town I'll run up to his rooms. I know them," answered Barnabas, putting his foot in the doorway.

"Take your foot away, and I will see. What name?"

"You can say Mr. Barnabas," replied the Lieutenant, withdrawing his foot reluctantly, after looking at the servant as if he would like to strangle him. "It's always the same," he muttered, as the door closed, leaving him on the safe side of the threshold. "If I was a bum-bailiff they wouldn't look at me more suspiciously or take greater pains to keep me out of the house."

The servant presently returned, and led

the way to the first floor, where he opened a door and admitted the scowling visitor.

There was no one in the room. Barnabas threw himself in the most comfortable chair he could find, tilted his hat forwards to rest his head against the back, crossed his legs, and looked round the room from under his hat with envious discontent. The apartment was heavy and dark, the furniture and appointments were ugly, but all was in keeping with the taste of those days, and betokened the proprietor's wealth and "elegance." While his eyes were yet wandering from one costly article to another, a door communicating with an inner chamber opened, and Mr. Gerard Crewe entered.

Mr. Gerard Crewe was a tall, delicate-looking gentleman of five-and-twenty, with sharp clean cut features, a pale complexion, and dark brown hair tied with a

ribbon. The expression of his face was cold and severe; his dark grey eyes were well sunk; his mouth was firm; his teeth particularly white and regular. He looked like a student, a poet, an artist, anything indeed but the brother of the heavy-browed rascal before him. A fine cambric handkerchief was round his throat, secured with a long, narrow diamond-set brooch, the ends edged with lace, fell upon his embroidered waistcoat. He wore an open dressing-gown, black silk stockings and morocco shoes.

"Well, Barnabas," he said, closing the door behind him.

"And well, Gerard," answered the Lieutenant, still examining the expensive articles of furniture, and not moving his position in the least. "We won't embrace. That would be about as unpleasant to you as me. I'll warrant you're not pleased to see me."

The fact was too obvious to need comment. Mr. Gerard Crewe sat down, crossed his legs, clasped his thin white fingers over his knee and looked at his brother with a faint expression of disgust in the angles of his lips.

"Pictures, books, chaney, gimcracks, gewgaws, everywhere," growled Barnabas, then turning his evil eyes upon Gerard and scanning him, he continued, "silk and satin, cambric, lace, diamonds."

"Do you want an inventory of my possessions?"

Barnabas brought his hands from behind his head, sat upright, and with a sudden accession of malice, struck his fist on his knee, exclaiming:

"It's a cursed shame. Here are we, brothers, and the younger lives like a prince, while the other fares like a dog, and worse. One has to read books and look at pictures, and dangle about my

lady this and my lord t'other, to pass the time away, while the other has to trudge a dozen miles, to beg a few pieces to pay for his night's lodging."

"You have no one but yourself to blame, Barnabas. You never would be led, and if of your own accord you insist upon walking in unclean places you must put up with soiled clothes. We started with the same advantages—except that your ambition was to be a blackguard, and mine was to be a gentleman. You always scorned my ambition, why do you envy me the result. You have no desire apparently to become a decent member of society."

"Oh! plague take your decent society. A pothouse and plenty is my motto. You keep your scents and civets, your powder and lace, your sneaking, cringing, bowing, scraping, lying, fiddling, squalling—What are you laughing at?"

"At your envying me the possessions you detest so heartily."

"Hang your possessions, I wouldn't give a fig for them all. It isn't them that galls me."

"Then what does?"

"Why it galls me that two thieves should be so unequally paid. Here am I, who drudge in the profession and starve, while you—"

"Control your tongue, or leave my room!" said Gerard, sternly.

"A man may tell the truth, I suppose," said Barnabas, dropping his voice, and speaking with dogged sullenness. "You don't want me to believe that you live like this on two hundred a year. Why, those diamonds in your handkerchief are a year's income at that rate. I'd have stuck to ciphering and reading, and quids and quods, had I known that they would show me how to

cheat and keep a clean face to the world."

"Do you want me to throw you down stairs? That is not the purpose with which you usually favour me with a visit." Barnabas gnawed his dirty thumb-nail in silence, and Gerard asked:

"What have you come for?"

"Money."

"What have you got in your pockets?"

Barnabas thrust his hand into his pocket, and then held up a piece of black crape, with a coarse laugh.

Gerard took a couple of guineas from his fob and laid them on the table, saying: "Take them, and go."

"Wait, I've something more to say. Sit down."

"I can listen, standing."

Barnabas finished his thumb-nail, and said:

"Did you ever wonder why Doctor

Blandly pays us two hundred a year, a-piece?"

"I have never troubled myself to consider."

"I have. You may take your oath he wouldn't pay me unless he was compelled to."

"What then?"

Barnabas began upon his other thumb-nail, and instead of answering the question, put another.

"Do you know anyone named Talbot? Thomas Talbot—the son of Admiral Talbot, of Talbot Hall, near Sevenoaks."

"I may have met him."

"Will you take your oath you know no more than that?"

"I know no more."

Barnabas gnawed silently for a minute, then put another question.

"How far back can you remember?"

"I can remember nothing beyond the

school where we lived from year to year."

"Nor I, worse luck! . . . . . Have you ever heard of penitance penny?"

"No."

"It's a penny that thieves give to the poor when they have stolen a pound. I know men who never pass a church without slipping a penny under the door. They think it will make it all right, and square them at the last. Well, I'm pretty sure that its the same thing which led our 'benefactor,' as Doctor Blandly, an old fool! calls him, to provide for us while we were youngsters, and give us our present income. It relieved his conscience. We were cheated and robbed when we were too young to know anything about it, and this paltry two hundred a year is a restitution to me."

"To you?"

"To me. I am the elder, and if any-

thing was taken, it belonged to me. Now, mark my words, Gerard—if you help me to recover it, I will give you half; we will share and share alike, and I'll put my mark to any paper you like to draw up."

"That would be a valuable voucher," laughed Gerard.

"Don't you sneer at it; I may be a fool, but I've got cunning for all that. I'm on the true scent; and if you find anything out about young Talbot—if you meet him in society, and can get at his history—it shall be to your good. I'll go on my knees and swear to go halves, so help me ——"

"Take your guineas and go. I know nothing of Mr. Talbot, and I refuse any kind of partnership with you."

The objectionable visitor was gone, but Gerard Crewe sat in the room still in sombre meditation. He was not thinking

of Mr. Talbot, nor of the source from which he had derived his education and part of his income, the subject had gone from his mind the moment that Barnabas quitted the room. He was asking himself if the charge brought against him by his brother was not true. His eyes were fixed upon a piece of rusty black crape that lay upon the rich carpet—the crape that Barnabas had exhibited, which had by accident slipped from his hand in returning it to his pocket.

"Are we alike, we two; thieves tainted and damned in our own conscience, and differing only in fortune?"

He rose and took up the crape with the tongs and put it upon the fire, and watched it smouldering away in moody abstraction. "And that is all the difference," he murmured, coming to the end of his reverie; "a piece of crape! He wears the villain's mask: I don't."

He turned from the fire with an impatient movement, and returning to the adjoining room with a quick step, sat down to breakfast.

CHAPTER V.

THE FIRST VIEW.

THE hostess of the "Black Boy" crossing the stable-yard to cut a savoy in the garden beyond, found Slink vigorously grooming his horse.

"A decent looking young fellow that, and works well," she said to herself, stopping to watch him.

Finding himself under observation, Slink raised his hand and touched his forehead with his knuckles respectfully.

"Where's your master?" asked the hostess.

"Gone for a stroll, marm."

"He seems mighty fond of strolling. What is his name?"

"Now what did he tell me?" Slink asked himself, scratching his ear thoughtfully with a corner of the curry-comb. "It wasn't captain, and it wasn't mister nor squire, for I can remember them."

"He is a gentleman, I suppose?"

"I'm not so sure of that," answered Slink, suddenly recollecting the caution his master had given him; "and now I come to think of it I'm sure he isn't."

"Well you know what he is then?"

"He's a nobleman travelling in—what the Dickens did he tell me he was travelling in? I've got such a plaguey memory that unless everything's written down for me in my book it all goes clean out of my head."

"You can read?"

"No, I'm no scholar; but if I've got

a thing written down in my book, and anyone asks me a question, I just let him read my book till he finds out what he wants to know. It's not a bad notion for a young fellow just turned nineteen."

"I should like to see your book," said the hostess, trying to keep a grave face.

"So should I. I forgot to bring it with me. However, I've hit on another capital notion that I'll be bound will answer as well. I've put a dozen horse beans in my near-side pocket; my off-side pocket's empty—no it isn't, there's one there. Now what's that for? Oh, I know. The young woman in the kitchen told me not to forget to wipe my feet when I came in. You see how it acts; and I'm bound to find it out, because when I'm not doing anything I have a knack of putting my hands in my pockets."

The hostess nodded approval, and Slink, highly-delighted with this testimony of his sagacity, continued :

"I'll just get his honour to tell me what he is, and what he's travelling in ; then I'll clap a couple of beans in my pocket to remember by. *That's* pretty good for a young chap, isn't it."

"Hum. And how long have you had this master ?"

"Ever since the day before yesterday."

"Where does he live ?"

"I'm pretty certain he told me, but don't remember now. If I'd only thought of my beans before !"

"And where did he engage you ? Do you remember that ?"

"Oh, yes, well enough. It happened we were both waiting at the blacksmith's to have our horses shod, and his honour came up and patted the mare, and beginning to talk in a sociable way about one thing

and t'other, asked me where I came from, and so on."

"And what did you reply?"

"I said I came from Talbot Hall, but I hadn't got a master, seeing that Doctor Blandly had wrote to the housekeeper to say he was killed in a battle by the French—plague take them! Then he seemed more interested than ever, and more kind, and said, seeing as I hadn't a master, he would take me into his service, and give me four times as much for wages as I had at the Hall."

"And you agreed?"

"Yes; but it were not for the wages altogether." Slink gave vent to a deep sigh, and hung his head.

"Mary tells me you've been crossed in love."

"And so I have; Jenny, the steward's daughter, the loveliest, prettiest maid in all Kent. She's pretty near broke my

heart; one day smiling at me till I felt prouder and happier than the king on his throne, and the next day making fun of me, till I wished I was dead and buried. I threatened to leave her often, and she was always asking me why I didn't, and daring me to it, and the day before yesterday she crowned it all by calling me a fool, so feeling right down desperate, I accepted his honour's service."

"Tell me what has happened since."

"Well, we took a long ride that night, and stopped at an inn to sleep. Yesterday we crossed a river by a ferry, and then we rode until we came here."

"Did anything occur upon the road?"

"Nothing. I jogged and thought of Jenny all the while, except when I raced the baker."

"Raced the baker?"

"Yes, while master went into an inn to drink something, and I was waiting

outside minding the horses, a baker stopped to give his nag a drink at the horse-trough, and he began to make fun of this horse as I'm a-grooming on now. 'Why don't you get a pair o' crutches for him?' he says. 'Because,' I says, 'he can run faster without 'em.' Then his honour came out, and says he, 'I'll wager a pound my man can strip you and your cart between this and the next milestone, and give you up to yon elm for a start.' 'I ha'n't got but a crown, but I'll wager that and start level,' says the baker. 'Done,' says his honour, 'jump up; but mind, if there's anything in the road we make a fresh start.' 'All right,' says the baker, chuckling and laughing, and up he gets into his cart, and up I gets in the saddle. His honour got up on the mare, and says 'One, two, three, off, you devils!' There wasn't nothing on the road, for why, it was nothing but a

ragged, country-side, out-of-the-way kind of a place. By the same token there wasn't any mile-stones. Well, the baker went ahead like the wind, and whack my horse as I might I couldn't gain on him, seeing that every moment he got more ahead of me. However, master kept up with the baker, and I just managed to keep in sight, when the baker pulled up his horse, for why, we'd run a couple of miles at least. When I came up I found his honour and the baker was having high words. 'I've beat him,' says the baker. 'No you ha'n't,' says master. 'I've done a couple of miles and more, and your man's been getting furder and furder behind every minute,' says the baker. 'What do that argufy?' says his honour, 'you ha'n't come to the first mile-stone.' 'And shouldn't for a couple of hours if we keep along this plaguey road,' says the baker. 'Then you've lost,'

says his honour. 'P'raps,' says the baker, 'but, anyway, I don't pay; why the horse ain't had a chance.' 'We'll put a end to this discussion,' says his honour; 'gentlemen always pays their debt of honour, and I'll take care you pay yourn. Just lay hold of the horse's head,' he says to me. The baker made to hit his horse and bolt, but his honour outs with his ——"

Slink's narrative was interrupted at this point by the approach of his master.

"Madam, I will trouble you to let me have my bill at once. Slink, saddle the mare," he said, looking angrily from one to the other.

"You don't want a bill, my fine fellow; I reckon you're not likely to pay twice. Your score comes to six shillings," said the hostess.

"And dear too, for a scurvy pot-house. Take it out of that."

He pulled out a guinea with an air of contempt, and as the woman went off to fetch the change, he said to Slink:

"What have you been gossiping about?"

"She wanted to know your honour's name, but for the life of me I couldn't remember it, but ——"

"Is that all?"

"I was just saying how we raced the baker, and I was just coming to the part where you promised to blow out his brains if he didn't behave like a gentleman——"

"Hang you for a fool! Didn't I tell you you were to hold your tongue or give indirect answers?"

"To tell lies! to be sure you did; I forgot it altogether, but it shan't occur again, your honour," and to remember it well Slink transferred a bean from his near-side to his off-side pocket.

When the hostess returned with the

change the Lieutenant and his servant were in the saddle. Giving a key to the hostler, she said:

"You can open the yard gates, Billy, the bill's paid." Then addressing Slink, she added, "You take an honest woman's advice, my lad; go back to your Jenny as soon as you can, and leave your fine gentleman to wait on himself."

Barnabas raised his whip as if to execute the wish of his heart, and strike the speaker, but prudence prevailed, and he let it fall upon the bony back of Slink's gift-horse instead, and the two sallied out of the yard.

They returned by the road they had come the day before as far as Southgate, where they dined; afterwards they left the main road, striking out towards Ware.

"Let me see what kind of a whip you carry," said the Lieutenant.

"I stand a good chance of getting another present," said Slink to himself, as he obeyed.

"Not a bad whip," said Barnabas, testing it on his leg, "but you will find your horse answer better to this,"—he handed his own—"he knows it."

"God bless your honour!" Slink replied, knuckling his hat. "My word! It's as heavy in the handle as if it was loaded with lead."

"All the good whips are like that. Now listen to me, Slink; I'm looking about for a man that owes me money, or his wife."

"And your honour expects to find him in these lanes—well I never?"

"Perhaps. However, I'm bound to find him sooner or later. I daresay he will pretend he don't know me, and doesn't owe anything, but I shall make him pay all the same."

"In the same way you made the baker behave like a gentleman?"

"That's it; and if it comes to an argument, or he tries to bolt, you'll just step in and give him a rap with the butt of your whip."

"Aye, if we're not lucky enough to have a constable near us."

"That's not probable, so keep your wits together." Barnabas flicked the mare, and they trotted forward.

They traversed the lanes without meeting anyone but a labourer, who, to give the approaching riders more room, scrambled through a gap in the hedge, and passed them on the other side.

It was getting dusk when they came into the high road, between Waltham Cross and Cheshunt. The Cambridge coach passed them at full speed, the horses' hoofs ringing sharp and clear upon the frost-bound road. The Lieutenant's

mare was resting, Slink was fifty yards behind him. The moment the coach had passed, Slink put his horse to a trot, and not daring to look behind him, said in a tone of fright:

"Master, is the coach stopping?"

"No; what's the matter?"

"Is anyone looking round?"

"Yes, the passenger behind the driver."

"It's the Admiral's son, Master Tom. For mercy's sake let's take to our heels."

But Lieutenant Barnabas Crewe waited until the coach was out of sight, trying to fix in his memory all he could see of Mr. Thomas Talbot.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE COACH.

THE coach had left Cambridge with four insides and two outsides, besides the driver and guard. One of the outsides was a burly farmer, who sat on the seat next to the driver; the other was Mr. Thomas Talbot.

As they neared Royston, three female servants suddenly darted into the middle of the road, and with unanimous cries and gesticulations signalled the driver to stop.

"Peter!" called the driver, raising his

chin from his collar and turning his head about three inches.

"Halloa!" responded the guard from behind.

"It's the gals' school; your insides is full, ben't it?"

"Yes, but as three of the insides is males, I'll be bound they can make room for some gals. Males can be wonderful obliging sometimes."

As the coach pulled up, the servants threw wide open the gate of the garden as if they expected the coach to enter, and ran up to the house beckoning and calling at the same time in a state of great excitement. There was a group of girls standing at the door of the large square house kissing and bidding farewell to one in their midst. One meagre lady of middle age stood on the path imploring Miss Elizabeth to hasten, while a second, equally meagre, though possibly more

middle-aged lady consulted with the guard.

"Can you make room for one young lady as far as Edmonton?" asked the guard, in an insinuating tone as he opened the coach-door.

"No, guard," cried a shrill voice that came from the further corner, behind the shoulders of an extremely stout old gentleman who sat with his hands on his knees and his arms akimbo, "we are already four, and that's too many."

"As for me," said the stout old gentleman, "you may stick in as many as you like; it will make no difference to me."

"What sort of young lady?" demanded a mild-looking young gentleman, who wore glasses and a simper. The guard slipping back allowed him to judge for himself.

The young lady had left the group, and

with a composed and stately gait was walking down the path; a young lady apparently about eighteen, with a little white impudent nose, a saucy mouth, and large dark eyes.

"I've no objection to her sitting on my knee," said the gentleman who had not yet spoken; "but I tell you candidly, guard, I'm not going outside to oblige anyone."

"Nor I neither," said the young gentleman with the simper; "especially if the young lady intends coming inside."

"I shall ride outside," said the young lady, after a glance at the closely-packed interior.

"But my dear Miss Elizabeth!" said the two meagre ladies in a breath.

"The afternoon is fine—I shall ride outside," answered the young lady, firmly.

"Well, guard, you must take great care."

The guard bustled off to unhook the short ladder and place it.

"I shall sit on the front seat."

"But, my dear Miss Elizabeth, there is a gentleman there."

"That is precisely why I intend sitting there. *I* prefer gentlemen to guards. Place the ladder here, if you please, guard." Having given this instruction, the young lady turned round to the house.

"Good-bye, Lady Betty!" called twenty young voices.

The young lady made the three steps and curtseyed to the ground, with the majesty of a princess.

"Thank heaven, we're not to have any more inside," said the shrill voice from the corner; "the coach is insufferably small."

"Large enough for me," said the fat man, "and it makes no difference how

many they choose to pack in. I always take my share of the room."

The coach started, and Tom Talbot commenced making his companion comfortable.

"Permit me to give you one of my rugs," said he.

"You have two?"

"Yes; would you like two?"

"Yes; but I would like you to have two also. They look large enough for both," she said, coming a little closer to his side, with a laugh.

"That is admirable economy! Tuck the edge under you—so. Are you comfortable?"

"Quite. Are you?"

"For the first time in my life I am content."

"Content; is that all, Sir?" asked the young lady, pouting her pretty round under lip.

"Happy, if you will; the words are synonymous in my mind. When I am content I want nothing to alter, and so I should like this coach to run on and on, until—until I saw you growing weary. Then my content would end."

The young lady smiled very sweetly.

"Such a pretty sentiment is worthy a more elegant name than content," she said.

"But you see I am not elegant," said Tom; "I am the son of an English sailor, who to his last hour fought the nation whose fripperies our fine gentlemen imitate, and I think I have inherited from him my hatred of elegance—the elegance of society, which leads men to cloak kindly thoughts and generous actions in such trappings that one cannot distinguish them from the artifices of the entirely heartless and selfish; that is the elegance I mean, and not the elegance

which is born in the lily and the lady alike."

Again the young lady smiled; then looking at Tom, she said with an accent of regret:

"You don't like society."

"I like the society of Esquimaux; I prefer the society of Red Indians; I like the society of Swedes, of Dutchmen, of Germans, of all simple people. I like the society of horses and dogs; but I hate the society of men who powder and paint, who have only just given up wearing muffs, and who still shave their heads that they may wear the hair of somebody else."

"Everyone hasn't such nice hair as yours."

"It's a good serviceable crop—keeps my head cool in summer and warm in winter, and so serves the purpose that Nature intended it for."

"You have travelled much?"

"Yes, ever since I left college."

"College!" said the young lady to herself; "he can't be the son of a common sailor, then."

"I prefer travelling to hunting, and one must do something," continued Tom.

"He must certainly be rich to travel for amusement," thought the young lady.

"And I have no particular talent."

"It seems to me you are in every way fitted for society," said she, responding to her own train of thought rather than to his last observation.

"Well, in being a fool, perhaps I am," he replied, laughing.

The young lady looked vexed; she was not accustomed to being laughed at.

"I fear you are annoyed."

"No; only I don't agree with what you say. Society, with all its faults, is not below the horses and dogs which you

prefer; and, if I may be allowed to say so, one who relinquishes the society of English ladies alone, for Esquimaux and Red Indians, is not himself without a fault."

Tom opened his eyes in astonishment to find a pretty young lady, who was clever besides, and sufficiently wise withal to see the weak point in his character.

"I accept your reproof," he said. "Conscience has accused me before now of egotism in setting myself apart from the society which includes much that is good and admirable. After all, it is innate repugnance rather than reason which has actuated me. But I owe you my apologies none the less; will you accept them?"

She drew her hand from under the rug and gave it to him with a gracious smile.

"And now our hands are linked," said

Tom, "may we not introduce ourselves? My name is Tom Talbot."

"And mine Elizabeth St. Cyr, better known as Lady Betty."

"I am your ladyship's humble servant."

They chatted on with increasing pleasure, for Lady Betty found that her companion was not half so ill-mannered nor so priggish as she had at first believed. His dress was not fine, she felt no ring through his glove when he shook hands with her, but still he was a grand figure of a man, and his brown face, if it was not handsome, had yet a frank honesty and genial kindliness that won her favour. Had he been a fine gentleman she dared not have spoken to him so freely; but it was impossible to maintain silence or reserve with one who had so much to say, and spoke his mind with such candour.

As for Tom Talbot, he was following in the footsteps of Hercules and Samson, and other mighty heroes, and having for ten years defied beast and man, and, be it added, woman also, he was willing now to set his neck under the dainty foot of the pretty young lady at his side.

"What bewitches me?" he asked himself, becoming absorbed in his own reflections. "Not her face; her features are not handsome, they are only pretty, though prettier never existed. Her complexion is exquisite, but the tint and texture of a skin are not sufficient to inthral one. Till the present moment I preferred dark complexions and hated red hair, but angels in Paradise should have a brow as white as hers, and such soft gold red hair should curl upon it for an aureole. Her voice is sweet, but I doubt if she could sing like that girl I met

in Rome, yet she had no charms for me. I have said I could never like clever women, yet she is not so simple as a hundred I have known and forgotten. She is absurdly vain, that is certain, and affects, in her school-girl way, the airs and graces of a fine lady. What is there to admire? I know not, unless it be that her charms and faults are so blended as to make her at once human and divine."

"I believe you are not listening to me at all," said Lady Betty, laughing. "Do you know you are staring quite rudely at me, and have not answered the question I put to you?"

"To tell the truth, I was not listening to you. Abstraction is the fault of men who live too much alone."

"I may demand to know what you were thinking about."

"I can scarcely tell you. At this mo-

ment I am wondering if I shall ever see you after to-day."

"It is not likely, if we are to meet only on the tops of stage-coaches."

"When do you return to Royston?"

"To school? never. My education finished last night, and in a few months I am to enter that society which you so much dislike; are you sorry?"

"Sorry that I may meet you no more?—yes. Sorry that you are going into society?—no!"

"Not sorry that I am going into society! why?"

"Because I see you look forward to it with pleasure."

"That again shows a sweet feeling on your part, but ——"

"But ungraciously expressed. Well, to be elegant, I might have given you another reason for not regretting your entrance to society."

"Tell me your other reason."

"Because it cannot fail to improve society. Which expression do you prefer?"

"The first. What a nice brother you would be."

Tom laughed.

"Why do you laugh?" she asked.

"I laughed not at your compliment, that I accept with gratitude, but at the nice distinction suggested by it. I suppose I am altogether too rough and unornamental to be thought of as a sweetheart?"

Lady Betty blushed, then tossed her head, saying to herself, "Sweetheart! what a shockingly vulgar and old-fashioned expression! why couldn't he say admirer?"

"Peter!" called the driver, raising his chin from his buttoned over-coat collar, and moving his head two inches to the left as before.

"Halloa!" responded the guard.

"Do you know him coming along on the brown hoss?"

"Know him, ah! and better pleased to see him in daylight than by a lanthorn."

"Why, it's Cap'n Small-pox, be'nt it?"

"Yes, but he's got a new hoss, and a groom, if you please. Ho! ho!"

They passed Captain Barnabas Crewe, and the guard called out:

"You're got your hay-de-kong, Cap'n."

"And a lively hay-de-kong he looks too," said the driver. "There's more of the calf than the fox in his face."

Tom Talbot, looking down at the "hay-de-kong" in question as they passed, exclaimed:

"Toby! my servant, or I'm very much mistaken."

"Did you say he was your servant, Sir?" asked the driver.

"Yes, who is the man he is with, do you know?"

"Don't know what he calls himself—we call him Cap'n Small-pox. He's on the road, if all we hear is correct."

"A highwayman?"

"Highwayman—ah!" The driver buried his chin in his collar.

CHAPTER VII.

FROM EDMONTON TO WINCHMORE.

"ARE there robbers about here—so near London?" asked Lady Betty, timidly.

"Robbers—ah!" responded the driver. "Plentiful as blackberries. The clerk at the 'Flower Pot,' in Bishopsgate, was reading the 'Times' yesterday as Cap'n Wallis, as I've met scores of times twixt here and Stoke Newington, was ketched at Pimlico turnpike with a brace of loaded pistols on him, and he's to be put to the bar for

stopping a Mr. Snowdon five o'clock in the afternoon, twenty-third of last month, in King's Road, Chelsea, and lifting off him a silver watch, two guineas, a seven-shilling bit, and some small pieces."

"Five o'clock in the afternoon!" said Lady Betty, faintly.

"Five o'clock in the afternoon—ah! Don't matter to them, so long as there's no one about. Why here the other day my old friend Johnny Clifford, a poulterer, as higgles round the country for chicks to take to Leadenhall, he was jogging along in his cart with his wife—it's his third wife—about this time of the day when, out of the cross road comes one of these captains and sings out, 'Money or your life.' Johnny just give his horse a crack to get off by running. 'Stop, dash your eyes! stop,' sings out this here capt'n, and blazes away with his barkers. Johnny's wife gives a scream and faints right away,

and he being a tender-hearted sort of a man, pulled up for her sake, and just turned out his pockets. Howsomever, as this cap'n was holding out his hand for the money, Johnny snatched the piece of crape off his face, and knowed him at once for Cap'n Allard, as had been prowling about Southgate and Winchmore and away to Hounslow for weeks and weeks. Well, he give information ——"

"You look frightened—there is not the slightest fear of the coach being stopped, and I think I am strong enough to protect you in an emergency," said Tom, seeing the terror in Lady Betty's face.

"Hush—I am listening!" she replied, leaning forward to catch the driver's words.

"Well, they bound my friend Johnny over to prosecute. This was wus than being robbed by Cap'n Allard. 'My lord,' says he to the Judge, 'if you

please I can't prosecute, for I'm a poor man, and I've thirty-five children!" And that's a fact, he's had three wives, and you can read it in the 'Times.' The Judge ordered him to have half a guinea for his expenses in coming to London, and expenses of prosecution paid. But, lor bless me, what's that to this galloping Dick that everyone's talking about? Breaking a man's arm in Clapton one half hour, and robbing a lady of her earrings in the Marsh the next."

"Are you going on to London?" Tom asked of his companion, whose eyes were round as a frightened fawn's.

She shook her head and listened eagerly to the driver, who having began to talk, seemed inclined never to leave off.

"Bless my soul, they'd rob anyone as they happened to find unprotected, and the worst of it is a gentleman don't know how to be safe. He takes a hackney

coach, or a po'-chaise to be safe, and ten to one the driver's in partnership with the highwayman—and there you are!"

Lady Betty put her muff up to her mouth, with an involuntary movement, and looked straight before her with scared eyes, as if she saw a dreaded highwayman threatening her.

"I ask you again, Lady Betty, where you are going to stop?" said Tom Talbot.

"At Edmonton. But oh! I have done a thoughtless thing—and—and I don't know what I shall do."

"Tell me what you have done."

"I insisted on going home to-day and mamma doesn't expect me until to-morrow."

"Do you live in Edmonton?"

"No, at Winchmore Hill, where that dreadful galloping somebody was seen—and there will be nobody to meet me, and it is getting dark, and I thought I should be

quite safe if I hired a fly to take me from 'The Bell.'"

"You need be under no alarm."

"How can you say that? don't you hear that all the post-boys and drivers are in league with the wretches."

"Do you think that I am in league with them?"

"You are not a post-boy."

"No, but I can drive."

Lady Betty's face lit up with eager hope, and she ceased to give half her attention to the driver's narratives, which had gone by natural transition from highway robberies to highway murders.

"And will you—that is, are you going to drive—?" she hesitated, in some confusion, and looked into his face with a conflict of hope and fear in her mind, for he had said nothing of stopping nor offered her his protection.

"I am going to drive from Edmonton

to Winchmore, and I will take you with me and deliver you safely to your mamma if——" he paused to prolong the suspense which gave light and shadow to his companion's young spring face.

"If what?" she asked with impatient anxiety.

"If Lady Betty pleases."

What more was needed to make him seem to her the most amiable, as he was the most handsome man she had ever seen.

Her gaiety returned, she chatted and laughed gaily, and ceased to attend to the driver's conversation, albeit his theme was now arson.

They alighted at "The Bell," where Tom ordered a tilbury to be prepared, and while the horse was being put in, he persuaded Lady Betty to drink a little hot negus, which she accepted with becoming reluctance, but drank with evident satisfaction.

It was but half an hour's drive from Edmonton to Winchmore, and Tom Talbot never used the whip once—he wished to lengthen the pleasant journey, rather than to shorten it; the edge of the red sun could yet be seen setting in a yellow glow beyond the delicate fretwork of purple boughs and woven twigs that bordered the horizon when they came in sight of The Chesnuts, which was the name Mrs. St. Cyr had given to her modest estate.

"There, there! Do you see the chesnut trees on the right, and the house lying back from the road with the blue smoke rising from the chimnies? That is my home," cried Lady Betty with excitement; "and there, above the apple-trees at the back, you can just seen the pigeon-house. Ah, look! there they go, my pigeons, with Maggie, the black and white one, leading just the same as ever. And hark! that

is Chloe barking. I believe she knows I am coming." A tear twinkled in her eye, and stood on her long dark lashes as she recognised these familiar sounds, and felt the full joy of returning to them. Tom groaned.

"Why do you make that noise?" she asked, turning to him and laughing, with a blush in her cheeks for the tear that dimmed her sight.

"Chloe, who hails your coming with pleasure, will whine when you leave. Do you take it I am less sensitive than a dog, Lady Betty?"

"I take it you are less faithful or you would not run away from me," she replied, archly. Turning her eyes again towards her home, she cried: "Ah, there's the gardener's boy sweeping up the dead leaves, and the gate is open. Drive right up to the door, and I'll keep my face behind my muff,

and astound mamma by my sudden appearance."

She leaned back in the tilbury as Tom drove past the gardener's boy and by the circular sweep that led to the front of the house; but before they reached the door she had abandoned her idea, and was craning her neck to catch the first glimpse of the window.

"She is peeping behind the curtains to see who her visitors are. I can see her pretty hand. Ah, there she is! Mother, dear mother!" she cried, and scarcely waiting for the horse to stop, she leapt to the ground and ran to embrace her mother at the door.

Talbot descended from the tilbury slowly, reluctant to approach in this meeting of mother and daughter. A mother's embrace, which he had never known, seemed to him to partake of a sacred character, and he feared to hear

the enthusiastic young girl pouring out tender words of endearment intended only for her mother's ear. The first words that he heard were these :

"So you have had the palings painted green !"

There is a moment in the most joyful meetings of ordinary people when the expression of pleasure being exhausted, it is necessary to return to plain matter of fact. Tom had come within hearing distance precisely at this juncture. His illusion was dispelled, and his embarrassment also.

"My dear, you have not introduced this gentleman," said Mrs. St Cyr.

Lady Betty turned in some confusion, for, to tell the truth, she had forgotten all about him in her excitement; then, recovering her self-possession, she introduced him with becoming formality. As suddenly she broke away from stately

etiquette and said, with impulsive volubility:

"Mr. Talbot and I are friends. He has shared his rug with me on the coach, he has saved me from robbers, and he has brought me home to you. We must show our gratitude, mamma. A short time since he groaned. He was polite enough to attribute his sufferings to the prospect of leaving me, but I believe in reality he felt the pangs of hunger. When will dinner be ready?"

"At five o'clock, and if Mr. Talbot will accept our hospitality, he will not lessen our obligations, but at least afford us an opportunity of expressing our gratitude." Mrs. St. Cyr curtsied.

"Now I ought to return some long-winded compliment, but for the life of me I don't know how to do it," said Tom Talbot to himself, so he bowed in silence and murmured an unintelligible sentence

expressive of his pleasure in accepting the invitation.

"It is too late to see the chicks, and the rabbits, and pigeons to-night I suppose, but I must run and say 'how do you do' to Chloe," said Lady Betty, and away she ran, leaving Tom Talbot with Mrs. St. Cyr.

The gardener's boy was instructed to take the trap into the stable, and a maid led Tom to the visitor's room, where he proceeded to make his toilet, pausing occasionally to listen to the voice of Lady Betty, who at one moment was calling to the servant and her mother, at another laughing, and filling up the interval by singing snatches of ballads.

When he had washed, re-tied his hair, and flicked the dust from his boots, Tom left his room. At that very instant, Lady Betty issued from hers upon the other side of the passage. He had lingered

over his preparations, she had hurried over hers. Each carried a chamber candle, and as they bowed, Lady Betty, tickled by the oddity of their position, laughed, and said :

"What a capital subject for a picture we present, Mr. Talbot."

"A subject that makes me regret I am not a painter," answered Tom, regarding her with unfeigned admiration.

Lady Betty looked more charming than ever in her simple evening dress. Divested of her furred pelisse and thick travelling coat, she naturally appeared taller and more graceful. Her dress was of pale lilac muslin, short-waisted, high in the throat, with a white tucker, short in the sleeve, which was looped up with ruby ribbon, and showed a snowy frill beneath. Every movement of her supple figure made a new, delightful curve, the clinging folds of her dress following the delicate

lines of body and limbs. Her long arms were exquisitely rounded and white.

She knew that she was beautiful, and stood a moment to be admired.

This little exhibition of vanity explained how she had come to be called Lady Betty. Tom offered his arm, which she took with the grace of a princess, and descended the stairs. It was the first time she had received such attention, and being led down in this manner exalted her imagination.

"Oh, fancy," she said, "if there were candalebra all down the walls, and servants on either side of the stairs"—she stopped, looked at the candlestick she had in her hand, and with a sudden transition from grave to gay, added: "why then we shouldn't have to carry each our brass candlestick, should we?"

CHAPTER VIII.

AT "THE CHESNUTS."

A MAID executed a rapid flight from the drawing-room with a dust-pan in her apron and a brush under her arm, and Mrs. St. Cyr appeared at the door, composing her features with a smile of welcome, as Tom Talbot and Lady Betty came to the foot of the stairs.

In the drawing-room Tom looked about him with fear, for the light was only sufficient to show him the danger of his position. Cabinets of *bric-à-brac* sur-

rounded him on all sides, and tables loaded with china made two steps in a straight line perilous. The candles sputtered over the difficulty of maintaining their new-born light, and the smoke and flame of the fire in the chimney seemed not yet to have settled the question of ascendency. Tom would have infinitely preferred the kitchen, but as he perceived the room had been prepared in his honour, he concealed his thoughts and piloted Lady Betty to the fire-side with no greater disaster than the smashing of a very ugly china dog, which seemed rather to gratify than displease Mrs. St. Cyr, who declared it would be worth double mended, the fashion having set in for pieced china.

Tom felt a little shiver run through Lady Betty's arm as it rested upon his, and seeing at once that if they were to be comfortable he must break through

formal restraint, he took up the tongs and attacked the fire at once.

"You will pardon me, madam," he said, "but I am habituated to making myself at home under less hospitable roofs than yours, so I take in our first acquaintance the privilege of an old friend."

He knew how to make a fire and coax it into its most generous mood; so the temperature of the room quickly mounted.

Dinner, which was to have been served at five, was not announced until half-past six—a delay which Tom could regret on Lady Betty's account solely, since all that they were called upon to suffer in the form of cold and hunger was entailed by his own rashness in accepting an impromptu invitation. However, the interval was not insupportable, for Mrs. St. Cyr was half the time absent—the production of a "genteel dinner"

calling for her personal superintendence—and Tom and Lady Betty found it just as agreeable chatting before a fire as upon the top of a stage coach.

Lady Betty did her best to charm the hungering visitor, and when a sweet girl smiles only a Goth or gourmand can look and think of eating. Nevertheless, Tom led the ladies into the dining-room, and took his place at the round table with a lively feeling of satisfaction.

The dinner was elaborate with innumerable side dishes; however, there was plenty to eat, and Tom's appetite was in a condition to appreciate everything. He would not listen to Mrs. St. Cyr's profuse apologies, but praised everything, and declared that the King of France had no better cook than hers.

It was not until the desert was served that Tom found time to examine the character of Mrs. St. Cyr, who, now that

the culinary cares were removed from her thoughts began to display the qualities of her mind. It was not long before he formed an estimate. She talked of nothing but fashions; of the movements in polite circles; of court balls; of forthcoming marriages in high life, and tattle about the aristocracy, whose names and family connections she seemed to have at her fingers' ends.

"I am agreeably surprised to find from the fact that you wear a ribbon, Mr. Talbot," she said, "that the 'Lady's Mirror' is in error respecting the fashion in which people of *ton* wear their hair. It was actually stated that peruques, except for evening wear, had gone out, and that the Prince of Wales has had his hair cut close behind and curled low on the forehead."

"That may well be, madam," replied Tom, smiling, "for I haven't had my head

dressed for ten days, and then by a rustic at Cambridge. Previously I had been absent from England for five years, so I cannot profess to know anything of our fashions."

"You have travelled a great deal," said Mrs. St. Cyr, led by curiosity to diverge from her favourite theme.

"Yes, my father was scarcely ever at home, and I stood as good a chance of meeting him in a foreign port as in England."

"Your father was a sea-captain, I presume."

"An Admiral. He fell in the King's service before Cadiz."

"An Admiral!" Mrs. St. Cyr cast an expressive glance at her daughter, and said, with a sigh, "Poor gentleman! But could not your friends or relations persuade you to stay amongst them."

"Relations; I have absolutely none

that I know of. My old friends are scattered; I found only two of my old companions at Cambridge, and my new friends are only just discovered."

Mrs. St. Cyr bowed, saying to herself, "No friends, no relations, and his father an admiral, dead! poor young man, he deserves to have friends, and he shall not go without while I live."

"It must be dreadful to have no home," murmured Lady Betty, looking at Tom with pity in her soft, sympathetic eyes.

"You make me think so by showing me how delightful a home may be," answered Tom.

"May I presume to offer you my hospitality while you remain in England, Mr. Talbot?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I shall be delighted to avail myself of it whenever a chance permits; but for some time business must occupy my attention to

the exclusion of pleasure. I have come to England to settle with my father's legal adviser as to the disposition of the estate which comes to me. I stand in the peculiar position of a man with a white elephant—I don't want it, and I can't conveniently give it away."

Mrs. St. Cyr itched to know more, but Tom was thoughtfully engaged in scraping crumbs into a heap with his dessert-knife. Lady Betty came to her mother's assistance.

"You excite our curiosity, Mr. Talbot, and it is only fair to us poor women that you should tell us more. We have no white elephants," said she.

"It is very simple. My wants are supplied by a yearly expenditure of three hundred pounds; I could have lived content on half that sum. And now I am told that I have to make use of a yearly income of three thousand pounds, besides

a Hall with thirty-nine rooms, and a park and grounds of a thousand acres. What am I to do?"

Mrs. St. Cyr held her breath; Lady Betty's eyes sparkled like the diamonds, her mind dwelt upon as a possible elucidation of the vexatious problem this interesting young gentleman was called upon to solve.

"An estate, a Hall with thirty-nine rooms, and three thousand a year!" murmured Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I cannot—I should not wish—to dispose of the old Hall; it has borne the family name since John Talbot received Queen Elizabeth in it."

"It would be sacrilege!" exclaimed Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I certainly cannot live in it. Odd as I am, I could not abide the solitude of living alone in a great place like that."

The ladies did not see the necessity of

living alone, but they held their peace, and Tom continued:

"I shall expect Doctor Blandly to help me out of my difficulty."

"Doctor Blandly! the name is familiar to me."

"It is quite possible; he lives at Edmonton."

"I know a Doctor Blandly, of Edmonton, who is a surgeon; he attended to my gardener when he hurt himself with a scythe. I remember the fact by the extremely uncivil answer he returned when, seeing how well he had cured my gardener, I wrote to him bidding him call to advise me on the palpitations to which I am subject. He sent word to say he could give me no better advice than to eat moderately and not lace tight."

"It is probably the same," replied Tom, maintaining a becoming gravity

with an effort, "Doctor Blandly was originally a physician, but amassing a competence while yet a young man, he gave up his practice and retired to his present residence at Edmonton to devote himself to botany and fishing. He is an odd, sweetly-disposed old gentleman, who professes to be a cynic and a misanthrope; but, nevertheless, his innate goodness asserts itself on the slightest occasion, and is so well known, that he has almost as much employment in ministering gratuitously to the maladies of the poor around him, as he previously had in attending to his wealthy patients. He is a shrewd and honest man, and his friends have taken his advice whenever they found themselves in difficult positions. My father was his school-fellow, and it is thus that Doctor Blandly came to conduct the management of his property and estate. I hope he will continue his ser-

vices in my behalf. I intend seeing him to-night, if you will permit me to leave at an early hour."

"Oh, Mr. Talbot, you will not leave to-night, the roads are dangerous," said Lady Betty.

"I shall have less fear in encountering danger than this afternoon, for you will not be imperilled."

Mrs. St. Cyr had been musing; she said suddenly:

"Mr. Talbot, I am about to ask a great favour of you, one that I feel scarcely warranted in asking upon such short acquaintance."

"You will do me great honour, madam, by such a mark of confidence."

"Will you introduce me to Doctor Blandly?"

"There is only one reason for hesitation, and that is the Doctor's avowed repugnance to the society of ladies."

"But you said that he professes a repugnance to mankind, yet he assists them."

"That is quite true."

"I should like to tell you my reasons for wishing the advice of such a man as Doctor Blandly, if it will not trouble you to hear them."

Tom Talbot made a gesture of complacent attention, and Mrs. St. Cyr, after a few minute's thought, continued:

"Since my husband's decease I have lived in retirement, and, as you see, with economy, in order that the fortune he left should accumulate by interest, and enable me, when Elizabeth left school, to introduce her to society and give her an opportunity of forming suitable connections and friends before my death."

"Mamma, dear, don't talk of dying, you are a young woman now," said Lady Betty, the tears springing in her eyes.

"My dear, you do not know what I suffer with the palpitations."

Lady Betty drew her chair nearer to her mother, and slipping her hand under the table, took her mother's, and held it with loving pressure, while Mrs. St. Cyr continued:

"The attorney who has hitherto managed my affairs died last week, and his partner is so old and stupid that I do not care to trust my financial arrangements to him. I know no one else, but it is absolutely necessary that I should find some honest adviser at once; my child's fortune depends upon it."

"In that case I feel sure Doctor Blandly will advise you."

"If you would introduce me as your friend."

"I shall have great pleasure in doing so."

"But mamma cannot go this evening!"

exclaimed Lady Betty; "and so, Mr. Talbot, you must stay all night, and take her to Edmonton in the morning."

Tom accepted without waiting for further persuasion. He who would go out of his way to oblige an old woman, could not hesitate to stay in comfortable quarters to give pleasure to a young one.

CHAPTER IX.

NIGHT AND MORNING.

MRS. ST. CYR kept a genteel pony-chaise, and as this would serve to convey her and Mr. Talbot the following morning to Doctor Blandly's, the tilbury was sent back to Edmonton, the gardener, who took it, being instructed to fetch the valise which Tom had left at the "Bell."

"What time will you be called in the morning, Mr. Talbot?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr, when they were separating for the night;

"we usually breakfast at ten. Will nine o'clock be too early for your hot water?"

"Not a whit, madam."

"I rise at half-past seven," said Lady Betty, archly. "Good night."

Mrs. St. Cyr followed Lady Betty into her room, and having closed the door silently and carefully, her first words, spoken in a low, impressive tone, were, "What a pity he hasn't a title."

"Why, mamma?" asked Lady Betty, with a blush.

"Because then he would be absolutely perfect, my love. The son of an admiral with an estate, a Hall with three thousand rooms, and an income of thirty-nine pounds—I mean a hall with thirty-nine rooms, of course, and an income of three thousand pounds. I am sure he deserves a title, and it is ten thousand pities he hasn't one. However, he has a pedigree, and that is a great thing. His figure is

quite superb, and he is extremely beauteous."

"I don't think one can call him beauteous, mamma."

"Well, my love, we may differ in that, but I assure you when he was telling us that he was absolutely without relations, and had more money than he knew what to do with, I thought I had never seen a more handsome man in my life. And then his manner!"

"I do not think his manners perfect. He is at times brusque."

"It is that which gives him such an air of distinction. One cannot expect a man in position to agree with everything one says, and have a perpetual smile on his face as if he were measuring off a dozen yards of bombazine like your Uncle William. By the bye, my love, you must be careful never to mention your Uncle William's name; it would ruin our pros-

pects to be known as the connection of a man in the drapery line."

"Mr. Talbot seems to entertain a thorough dislike to society."

"My child, it is not of the slightest importance what a man likes or dislikes before his marriage; it is afterwards that a woman has to conform them with her own."

"You have already settled that I am to marry Mr. Talbot then," Lady Betty said, laughing.

"Hush, my darling, you will be overheard. I certainly know no one more eligible than Mr. Talbot at present. It is certainly a great drawback his having no title, and to be sure many merchants have thrice his income; at the same time there are many noblemen who are as rich as the wealthiest commoner. I should like my son-in-law to have a title if it was only baronet; a lord would be better still,

but my taste has always been for earls. I read the other day that the Marquis of Westminster's fortune is prodigious."

"Then there's little hope for Mr. Talbot," Lady Betty laughed again.

"My love! Mr. Talbot will think you are laughing at him, and I would not for the world displease him. He may be of the greatest service to us, for though we take the most genteel house in Piccadilly, we cannot obtain friends without an introduction, and Mr. Talbot must have acquaintances. Besides, it is a great advantage to a young lady in society to have an admirer to start with; it attracts attention and collects others, like a fly on a treacle-paper."

"But Mr. Talbot will leave England as soon as his affairs are settled by Doctor Blandly. He has only seen me once for a few hours, and I am not sure that he

likes me even. I believe he thinks me silly on some points."

"A very good sign. He wouldn't like you, depend upon it, if he thought you wiser than himself. And there's not the slightest doubt you have made a conquest. Perhaps you didn't notice how he blushed, faltered, and finally tried to conceal his emotion by drinking a glass of wine after you had induced him to try my pickle."

"It was too hot for him, perhaps."

"Oh, no, my love; a mother's eye is not to be deceived. And besides, what pretty girl is there who cannot make a man like her if she sets her mind to it? You have made your first conquest, and as to any fear of Mr. Talbot leaving England—well, he may think what he likes about it, but I know he will not. I shall ask him to dine with us on Sunday, and if he refuses, you may tell me that I know nothing of human nature. Now kiss

me, my darling, and go to bed, for you have to rise at half-past seven, remember."

At that moment Tom Talbot was saying to himself:

"She has certainly the most beautiful arms I have ever seen in my life; she is graceful and fascinating to a degree, but —may Heaven preserve me from ever being fool enough to marry a girl with such a mother. She is absolutely vulgar with her eternal prattle about fashions, and her yearnings after the society of 'bongtong,' as she calls it. I pity the poor girl, for I fear she has not sufficient force of character to resist the pernicious influence of such example and teaching. She is already a little touched with her mother's mania. As for myself, I must be careful how I yield to the witcheries of the little siren, though there's little danger in that. She wouldn't be likely to fall in love with me under any circumstances,

and I suppose I shall never set eyes on her again after to-morrow morning. One is never romantic before breakfast, and she'll find me as chilly as the morning, I warrant."

With this satisfactory reflection Tom Talbot turned upon his side and fell asleep.

Tom Talbot was sitting in the drawing-room, gravely reading one of Mrs. St. Cyr's favourite magazines—"The Court Gazetteer and Lady's Indispensable Compendium of Life and Fashion" was its title—when Lady Betty came down the following morning.

"Are you improving your mind, Mr. Talbot?" asked Lady Betty, after salutation.

"Possibly; but not my temper. You have come in time to save me, I hope, from the worst effects of the book's splenetic influence. A few pages more would

have made me doubt if there was anything in woman to admire but her beauty."

"You are more exacting than most men to want more than that. It is too early to be serious, and I am going to visit my pets. Are you ready to accompany me?"

"Quite—and you? I did not hear you enter the room. Have you your shoes?"

Lady Betty extended her foot with its neat shoe, giving a glimpse of a dainty ankle in a clocked black stocking.

"It is no wonder I failed to hear the fall of such a foot!" said Tom.

Lady Betty acknowledged the compliment with a coquettish courtesy, and led the way into the garden.

"Oh, what a lovely morning!" she exclaimed, "and no signs of the frost giving. Mr. Talbot, can you skate?"

"Fairly. As I do most things—not well."

"Will you teach me? There is a famous pond at the foot of the hill."

"Have you skates?"

Not at present; but mamma can buy them to-day."

"You forget that after breakfast we part."

"No; you are going to take mamma to see an old gentleman who does not like ladies; but after that——"

"After that I leave England."

"On business?"

"No, for pleasure."

They had come to a wicket, which Tom opened; Lady Betty turned, and with one hand on the gate and the other on the post barred the way. She wore a tippet and a hood bordered with fur, which made a suitable frame for her pretty face. She

held her head a little on one side; a smile made her eyes bewitching.

"Would it not give you as much pleasure to stay in England and teach me to skate?" she asked.

"Undoubtedly; but there are some pleasures that one should avoid to be happy. It will take me some time to forget you, though our friendship is not yet a day old."

Lady Betty ceased to smile. She looked up in Tom's face with unwonted gravity.

"It is a selfish kind of happiness that depends upon your not liking anyone very much," she said.

"Yet I do not feel as though I could be selfish when I look at you," said Tom.

"Then for my pleasure you would stay and teach me to skate?"

Tom bowed. "Where are my resolves of last night?" he asked himself.

At that moment Chloe barked, and Lady Betty, clapping her hands, cried, "I have been forgetting all about poor Chloe," and away she ran to the outbuildings where the dog was chained, leaving Tom to follow as he would.

"Hum!" said Tom to himself, "that shows how much she values the sacrifice. Forsaken, at the very moment when I should be most dear, for a yelping hound! If the frost breaks up she will not want me. And that I see is the best thing that could happen to me."

Turning a corner beside the orchard, he found lady Betty on her knees with her arms round the neck of a Newfoundland, caressing the animal, and talking such unintelligible nonsense to it as dogs in common with babies seem to understand and enjoy.

"Oo members me all this time, Chloe, oo faithful old pet! and oo wants to come with oo's little Lady Betty, and oo shall; but oo won't frighten Lady Betty's pigeons, will oo?"

She unfastened the chain-snap, and Chloe, faithful to canine instinct, took to her heels and bolted off to the kitchen.

It was a moment of disappointment to Lady Betty; but her eyes following the deserter fell upon the hutch of her favourite rabbit, to whom she at once transferred her affection. Presently, with a whirl and a flutter, the covey of pigeons settled on the roof of an adjoining shed.

"Oh, my pretty pigeons," she cried. Then she called Tom, whom she had sent off to the garden. "Mr. Talbot, Mr. Talbot! never mind about pulling up any more cabbages—run into the stable for me

quick, and bring some grain for my birds."

Tom obeyed, and brought a sieve of oats from a bin in the stable, which she took without so much as a single word of thanks, for she was talking to the pigeons in terms of tender blandishment, to which they responded in voices not more soft than hers, as they strutted and pirouetted on the ridge tiles. At the sight of grain they came fluttering to her feet, and Maggie, a black-and-white patriarch, bolder than the rest, flew up, and ate from her extended hand.

It was a pretty picture—the young girl amidst her pigeons—which Tom looked upon with silent delight.

"And she is to be torn away from these innocent delights, and taught to like the heartless pleasures of a senseless world!" he said to himself, with a sigh.

"She is a child and 'tis a shame to make her a coquette."

He did not recognise that the beauty of Lady Betty's childishness owed its piquancy to her coquettry, and that had she been merely childish, she would have been as uninteresting as the peasants of Flanders, whose extreme innocence he had frequently condemned for stupidity. Had she not been very pretty, it is tolerably certain he would not have cared a jot whether her tastes were simple or otherwise.

He still felt sentimental when Lady Betty, setting down the sieve of oats, said:

"Feed yourselves now, dears, Lady Betty's fingers are getting blue in her gloves. Come, Mr. Talbot, I will leave all my darlings for you, because—I am cold. Let us have a brisk walk, there is still plenty of time. We can walk down

the hill and see if the ice bears. By-the bye," she added, stepping along beside Tom with a quick, springy step, "we were talking about the ice—ah, yes, and you promised to teach me skating, at my earnest entreaty."

"When Chloe barked, and you forgot all about me."

"That was decidedly rude," Lady Betty laughed; "but you don't look very vexed with me."

"One could not see you so innocently happy and remember one's vexation. Will you not be very sorry to leave your pigeons and domestic creatures?"

"Oh, I shall be more than sorry to leave my pets. I do not mind admitting to you that I shall have more than one long cry when we separate."

"These simple pleasures seem to harmonize so perfectly with your disposition."

"As for that, my disposition is of an accommodating kind, and harmonizes very well with nearly everything that is agreeable."

"Seeing you among your present pleasures, I cannot imagine how you will relinquish them."

"Ah! you should have seen me with a doll," said Lady Betty gravely. "You might have thought it would have broken my heart to give it up. I buried it with tears, Mr. Talbot."

"Buried it!"

"Yes, the day mamma said I must have a long frock made, I made up my mind for the sacrifice, and the morning it came home from the dressmakers, I buried my doll—and many a time I was tempted to exhume it. It lies in the grave next to my canary."

"But a doll is not the same as living creatures."

"No." Lady Betty sighed, and then with a tone of resignation: "Everything in its turn. First sugar-sticks, then dolls, then pigeons and rabbits."

"You will not make a good exchange I fear, for the latter."

"Why? Do not you think men and women are more interesting than rabbits and pigeons?"

"I imagine that you are not debarred from either in the country."

"Ah!" said Lady Betty, sententiously, "that is because you know so little about it—look at poor mamma, she has lived here ever since papa's death—nearly fourteen years, and she knows absolutely no one but the clergyman, who only talks about the lake of brimstone and fire, and the deaf gentleman that lives in the house down there, and his chief recommendation is that he never talks at all. A country life is delightful if you can always have a

friend staying in the house, and if you can leave it for five or six months in the year."

Tom laughed, despite himself—Lady Betty continued:

"Why do you think a country life so suitable to me—because people living in the country are usually so intensely stupid?"

"A country life is allowed to be innocent and beautiful, and therein it seemed suitable to you!"

"Don't you think its charms are overdrawn? Poets who wrote most about it live in towns and exaggerate the little they have seen to admire. I should like to see it as they see it—a little. One would think that the sun always shines, and roses continually fill the air with perfume; and lambs skip about to the tunes played by clean shepherds. They do not know what six weeks bad weather in an isolated

house is, they never saw a shepherd in the stocks for being drunk and using bad language, and they never mention the cries of a pig having a ring put in his nose. And what constitutes its innocences—highwaymen in the lanes to keep you in doors, with a fear of burglars that make you doubtful if it wouldn't be better to stop in the lanes?"

"Do you wish me to believe that the country is disagreeable to you?"

"No. I love the country as well as you do—perhaps better, Mr. Talbot, or you would settle down as a respectable hermit with less fear of encountering the lively members of society whom you so detest. What I wish you to think is, that I have aspirations to a higher form of life than that whose most agreeable representatives live in hutches and kennels."

Tom was astonished by the warmth

and strong sense of Lady Betty. He had seen her face coquettish and childish, but now he found it animated with an intelligent light, and almost severe in its earnest expression.

"There is nothing prettier than a brood of young rabbits, or a nest of blue eggs—no sound sweeter than the first song of the nightingale, but it would be wicked to limit my senses to the enjoyment of them when Providence has given me the intelligence to appreciate Raphael and Mozart. I do not profess that for high objects alone I prefer life to seclusion. I am fond of dress, fond of talking nonsense, and laughing at trifles, fond of farce as well as tragedy—though I have never yet been to a theatre except in my dreams—fond of gaiety and movement, fond of dancing, fond of having my eyes wide open for eighteen hours out of the twenty-four. *I hate yawning*, and now you know why

a country life is not suitable to my disposition."

"You are very earnest," was all Tom could say in comment.

"I feel very earnest. You have roused me by your contempt for society."

"You will give me credit also for sincerity."

"Yes, but not for impartiality. You are quite narrow and prejudiced. You adhere to an opinion which by your own showing, was formed ten years ago, and which has been exaggerated by seclusion and--if I may add it without offending—ignorance of what you condemn."

"I am afraid that you are only too just—I was a young man, and I believe, even more conceited than I am now, when I settled that I was too good for society."

"In that case you ought, in justice to

yourself, to reconsider the subject, and so when you have taught me to skate, you will yet have something to do before leaving England. Ah! here is the pond. Hold my hand and let me see if the ice is strong."

Tom took her hand and held it firmly as the urgency of the case required, while Lady Betty ventured across the frozen water with timid steps.

The ice did not crack, but the surface was wondrous slippery, and Lady Betty's foot slipped more than once, causing her to laugh and fear at the same time.

"It would be safer if you held my arm?" she said.

Safer indeed for her, but not for Tom. A thrill ran through his veins as he clasped the beautiful arm, of which he had dreamed, and he felt a strange gratification in sustaining their mutual position of dependance and support.

Before he relinquished his hold he had reconciled himself to the necessity of postponing his departure from England.

CHAPTER X.

A VISIT.

"MR. TALBOT, how do I look?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr, as the chaise drew near Edmonton.

Tom looked at his companion in order to give a fair answer to a question which was asked with the utmost gravity. Mrs. St. Cyr was still pretty; her complexion was particularly fresh and fair which, but for her stoutness, would have made her appear ten years younger than she was. The few artificial touches of pencil and powder were unnoticed by Tom's unpractised eye,

and he answered with perfect candour, and in a tone which carried conviction :

" Madam, you look extremely well."

" I am glad to hear it, for I assure you I attach a great deal of importance to the interview with Doctor Blandly, and when a woman wishes to interest a gentleman in her business affairs, she cannot be too particular about her personal appearance."

Tom smiled. Mrs. St. Cyr continued :

" I assure you there is truth in my assertion. How is it that charitable ladies can never raise subscriptions ? it is because charitable ladies as a rule are dowdy. Can you tell me if Doctor Blandly sees many ladies ?"

" Scarcely any. A lady never enters his house—if he can prevent it—and he refuses invitations where it is possible he may meet ladies. I have heard him speak occasionally, and not in amiable terms, of

Mrs. Baxter, the wife of the Reverend John Baxter, a particular friend of his."

"Mrs. Baxter! I know her by sight—a woman who looks as if she had been buried for a week, and unfortunately resuscitated. If Dr. Blandly has seen only that woman, I am not surprised at his aversion to the sex."

"I hope you will convert him, madam."

"I am not without hope. It is a great advantage to know his character beforehand—he is very fond of botany you said, I think?"

"Yes; and of fishing also."

"Unfortunately I know nothing about fishing; happily I have some knowledge of gardening. Augh! what a horrible smell."

"Some one is burning weeds."

"It is shameful to allow such a public nuisance; it is worse than a brick-kiln.

I shall carry the odour in my dress, and that will undo everything. And now look at the smoke! John, John!" she called to the gardener who, dressed in livery, was driving the chaise. "Drive quicker. Beat the horse! Quick, quick, I shall be smothered. I must be covered with smuts."

"I assure you your complexion has not suffered."

"And my bonnet, Mr. Talbot? I tried on half a dozen before I found one to my liking, and this light beaver must catch the blacks, I am sure."

"Not a speck, madam, and we have passed the smoke."

"Dear me, we are just in the high-road, and close to Doctor Blandly's house. Let us drive the other way for a few moments that the smell may escape from my clothes. Turn to the right, John. And after all the precautions I have taken."

"Doctor Blandly being a gardener may not dislike the smell of burning weeds."

"It is impossible any human being can endure such a stench as that. However, I have my lavender-water with me, and if I sprinkle some of that over my dress it may at least counteract the smoke. Ah, I have brought civet by mistake; but it will have the same effect. 'Tis an elegant perfume. Can you tell me if Doctor Blandly has any other likings, Mr. Talbot?"

"He likes cribbage, and punch, and a pipe."

"Thank you. If I were a general I should never offer battle to my enemy until I was thoroughly acquainted with his weak points. I think we may turn now. John! turn round—stop at the first house past the 'Bell.'"

A sudden change in the wind wafted the offending smoke down the lane which

ran between Dr. Blandly's garden and the "Bell," and blew it across the high-road at the very moment the chaise was passing.

"Oh, if I were a man!" said Mrs. St. Cyr, through her closed teeth, "how I would swear!"

The condition was not much better when they stopped in front of Doctor Blandly's house, a thick cloud of smoke filled the garden.

"We will pass through it as quickly as possible," said Tom, handing Mrs. St. Cyr from the chaise. "I know the secret of opening the front gate, and I may dispense with formalities in visiting the Doctor."

Mrs. St. Cyr kept her handkerchief to her mouth, and said nothing.

"Hilloa, who's there?" called out old Jerry, as he came from among the evergreen shrubs, on hearing the gate open.

"A friend, Jerry. Where is your master?"

"Oh, 'tis you, Mr. Talbot, hey—right glad to see you, Sir." He suddenly stopped, and looking at Mrs. St. Cyr, passed his hand thoughtfully over his mouth and chin.

"Is your master in the house?" Tom repeated.

"No, he's looking after the bon-fire in the kitchen garden; but do he know, Sir, that you are bringing all the world with you?"

Tom passed by with Mrs. St. Cyr, only saying, "I will find him," and opening a wicket by the side of the house led her into the garden at the rear, taking the weaker side of the dense column of smoke which filled one half of the garden and swept over the wall.

In the murky distance could be seen the outline of a stout man forking

litter from a barrow on to the smoking heap.

"That is Doctor Blandly," said Tom in a low voice, to his companion.

"Doctor Blandly! I expected to find an old gentleman with white hands and silk stockings examining botanical specimens through a magnifyer; and it is his fire that is making this smoke." In a moment Mrs. St. Cyr took the handkerchief from her mouth, and assumed as amiable an expression as could be arranged in the time.

Doctor Blandly did not hear the approaching footsteps, for he was singing and working at the same time, with his back to the house.

"Up came a pedlar whose name was Stout,
And he cut her petticoats all round about.
Singing, Fol dol de rol! hi, fol de rol!"

At this point Tom, not knowing what lengths the pedlar whose name was Stout

might go in the following verse, thought proper to interrupt the Doctor's song by a tolerably loud cough.

The Doctor ceased to sing, and turned to see who his visitor was. Mrs. St. Cyr looked at him incredulously. Could this be the lawyer, the physician, the retired gentleman of whom she had heard so much praise. Indeed Doctor Blandly looked very unlike the popular conception of a gentleman. He wore a brown cloth sleeved-waistcoat, a pair of fustian breeches, grey worsted stockings, a coloured handkerchief, and a red worsted night-cap, drawn well over his ears to compensate the absence of his wig, a pair of well-worn leather garden gloves completed his dress.

"What, my boy Tom!" he cried, thrusting his fork in a heap of weeds. He came forward, pulling the glove off his hand, looking from Tom to the lady

on his arm in blank astonishment. He gave his hand to Tom, who said:

"Let me present a lady to you, Doctor Blandly—Mrs. St. Cyr."

"Mrs. St. Cyr!" said Doctor Blandly, in a tone of deep relief. "Ah, my boy, I was afraid you had made a fool of yourself. But you are still a bachelor, I can see that by your face—cheerful and content, thank Heaven!"

He made a stiff bow to Mrs. St. Cyr, who responded with her sweetest smile, and said:

"I am charmed to make your acquaintance, Doctor Blandly. I assure you I take this introduction as the greatest favour that my dear friend, Mr. Talbot, could render me."

Mrs. St. Cyr struggled bravely to the end of this speech, and then began to cough violently, a gust of wind having driven the smoke across the garden.

"Dear friend, eh?" said the Doctor, in a low voice to Tom, while Mrs. St. Cyr was still coughing. "Looks like a widow. Nothing foolish going on, Tom. Not going to be caught by such a fly as that, eh?"

"Nothing of the kind, I assure you," Tom whispered.

"Thank Heaven! We will go in the house now my mind is easy on that point. I am afraid the smoke irritates your throat, madam."

"A little; but it is of no importance, and I assure you I quite like the smell."

"I don't, madam; there's a bone or a piece of flannel got into the fire. Pough! Don't you smell it, Tom?"

"No, Sir; nothing but the ordinary smell of burning weeds and earth."

"Oh, there's something else;" said the Doctor, sniffing the air about him with dissatisfaction, and pulling his snuff-box

from his breeches pocket. "Take a pinch, my boy? Hum! Do you snuff, madam?"

"No. I hear that snuffing for ladies is going out of fashion in polite circles."

"Mrs. Baxter snuffs."

"Mrs. Baxter! One cannot be surprised at her doing anything that is unpleasant."

"That's what I say, madam, and the parson can't deny it; all he can say in her behalf is that she's no worse than other women. Pough! Hang that bone! I can't get the smell of it out of my nose."

"I am sure I can't tell what there is to object to in the smoke, Doctor Blandly," said Mrs. St. Cyr; "it is very—oh, very refreshing and agreeable."

"That is not the only subject on which we should probably disagree, madam."

"On the contrary," said Mrs. St. Cyr, anxious to provoke a controversy which

might offer her an opportunity of yielding. "I think we should agree upon most subjects. To begin with, I am passionately fond of botany."

"Do you dig, madam?"

"Dig! Oh, Doctor, how can you ask such a question?"

"Because no persons can love botany unless they do. I advise you to try digging. Well, my boy Tom, so you have come to see me at last. And the Admiral has paid the debt of Nature—the only debt he ever had—and I have lost an old friend and you a father."

Tom nodded in silence.

"Poor dear old gentleman!" sighed Mrs. St. Cyr.

"I see no reason to pity him, madam; he fell as he wished to fall, giving his life for his country, a gallant English gentleman. May I ask, Tom, why you have brought a visitor with you?" The Doctor

put the question in a tone of unconcealed irritation.

"Mrs. St. Cyr has urgent need of your advice; that is a sufficient explanation."

"Oh, you are in trouble, madam," the Doctor said, with less acerbity in his tone.

"Indeed I am. The legal adviser I have relied upon exclusively for many years is dead. I have lived in seclusion for so long that I know absolutely no one to whom I might apply for advice, and my affairs are of a delicate nature, which I should hesitate to lay before an ordinary —a selfish—a ——"

"Enough, madam, we will go in the library at once. Tom, you know the house; make yourself at home, my boy. By this door, madam. Heugh! I'll be hanged if that stench hasn't got in the house!" Opening the library door to Mrs. St. Cyr, he called to the gardener's

wife: "Martha tell Jerry to go and look to that fire, there's something got into it that's stink—that's poisoning the house out. It must be the bones of that pike I caught last Tuesday."

Mrs. St. Cyr pressed the cork deep into her bottle of scent, and as Doctor Blandly closed the door, said:

"Ah, you are a great angler, Doctor Blandly. I must say I know very little about the science."

"Thank Heaven!" murmured Doctor Blandly, in parenthesis.

"I have only fished once, and then sat all day in a punt and caught nothing."

"Nor any one else on that occasion, I imagine." Then he added to himself, "Good Lord, how she would talk! A woman in a punt for a day's fishing. One might as well have a boy with a set of clappers and a horse pistol."

"To tell the truth I prefer domestic

amusements. Cribbage for example. I could spend all my time playing cribbage."

"Glad to hear it, madam. I'm sure you couldn't spend your time to greater advantage. Now, if you please, we will come to the purpose of your visit."

Doctor Blandly sniffed the air, looked around him fiercely, took a pinch of snuff, and pulled his chair up to the table.

CHAPTER XI.

OIL AND VINEGAR.

"WHAT I am about to reveal is in strict confidence, Doctor Blandly, in perfect reliance upon your secrecy." Mrs. St. Cyr said, laying emphasis on the words secrecy and confidence.

"You need be under no apprehension for in the first place a man knows how to hold his tongue, and in the second he very seldom hears anything from a woman that is worth repeating."

Mrs. St. Cyr seemed to gulp down her

feelings with difficulty before recommencing.

"I must tell you at the commencement," she said at length, lowering her voice, "that my husband's name was Brown. At his death, for reasons which will be obvious to you presently, I resumed my maiden name. This fact is unknown to anyone, my daughter being too young at the time to understand matters of this kind, and my life for the past fourteen years having been a secluded one. There is nothing culpable in changing one's name; nevertheless, I have kept the fact secret even from my daughter."

She paused, expecting perhaps that Doctor Blandly would express his disapproval; but he said nothing. He nodded as a sign for Mrs. St. Cyr to continue. A doctor and a lawyer are accustomed to hearing confessions, and are only anxious to avoid

increasing the embarrassment of their clients, which too frequently prevents them from a candid statement of their case.

"My father held a good position in society. He lived constantly up to his means. I had many lovers, for I was considered pretty then, Doctor Blandly." The widow paused again for the Doctor to make a compliment, if there was a spark of gallantry in his nature. Doctor Blandly fished out a stick from the miscellaneous collection of rubbish in his left hand pocket and a knife from his right, and looking at the stick thoughtfully, opened his knife and proceeded to trim it up for the purpose of marking the spot where he had sowed some seed.

With a sigh, Mrs. St. Cyr continued:

"My father died suddenly, leaving me penniless. My lovers forsook me—all except one whom I had encouraged the

least. He was the poorest, and his name was Brown. There was no choice between marrying him and starving. I married him; three years after our marriage my husband died."

"The wisest thing he could do," said Doctor Blandly to himself, as he carefully shaved his stick.

"You follow me, Sir?" asked Mrs. St. Cyr, seeing no sign of interest in the Doctor's face.

"Perfectly. I never heard a woman keep to the point so well. Three years after marriage your husband died."

Mrs. St. Cyr, thus encouraged, proceeded:

"I loved my husband, and did my best to make him happy; I also loved my child, loved her with all my heart, and I love her now—not with the passion of a young mother and a widow, but still with all the love of my heart."

The Doctor ceased to scrape the stick as he heard these words, which were uttered with honest warmth, and looking up, found that the powdered and painted lady's lips were twitching, and her eyes wet with standing tears.

"I hope your daughter deserves your love, madam," he said kindly.

"It is impossible not to love her, Doctor, for she is not only good and affectionate, but also clever and beautiful; and I assure you, has a prodigious fine air."

The Doctor turned again to his former occupation, with no other expression on his face than that of attention to the careful shaving of his little stick.

"You are straying from the subject, somewhat," he said quietly. "Let us return to the time when your husband died."

"I found myself, at his death, in the

possession of ten thousand pounds. Thinking of my child's future, I determined to put this sum in the public funds, to retire from society, and live within the income yielded by the interest on my money. With three hundred pounds per annum I have lived comfortably in my seclusion, and given my daughter a good education."

"I never dreamt a woman could be so reasonable," thought Doctor Blandly.

"Her education is now completed, and the time has arrived for realising the purpose with which I left society, and which has encouraged me for so long to support the dulness and solitude of my life. I am about to re-enter society, and introduce my daughter to the world of fashion and elegant society."

"A fool, and no better than the rest after all," said the Doctor to himself with a vicious cut at the stick.

"I am aware that to take a genteel house in the West-end, and live in polite style, more than three hundred a year is requisite."

The Doctor responded with a nod of satisfaction.

"Rents and living have gone up so of late years, that I doubt if we could make any appearance under six hundred a year, and if one kept a coach, it would mount to eight hundred. Now, Sir, you know the position in which I stand, and why I am so anxious for your advice."

"Do you wish me to advise you for the happiness of your daughter and your own welfare?"

"Yes, Doctor Blandly."

Still trimming his stick, Doctor Blandly replied:

"My advice is, madam, that you continue to live within the income arising from your invested capital. Have nothing

to do with fashionable society, and content yourself with a good, stout-springed pony-chaise."

"You misunderstand me, Sir, I wish to know how to live at the rate of eight hundred a year with a capital of ten thousand. For I have already decided upon living in London, and nothing can move me from my decision."

"The answer to that question is very simple—cut your ten thousand pounds into twelve pieces, and spend one piece every year until all is gone."

"But what am I to do after that?"

"Regret that you did not accept my first advice."

Mrs. St. Cyr waited a few moments while Doctor Blandly, unmoved, patiently scraped away at his seed marker, then she said:

"Is it not possible to buy an annuity with my money?"

"Yes. What sort of annuity have you been thinking about?"

"An annuity terminable with my life."

"What advantages, in your mind, has an annuity over the simple plan of taking as much as you require until you die or your capital is used up? the individual paying an annuity always calculates to gain by his work."

"But all whom I have known have been disappointed."

"Hum! Then you fancy you would get the best of the bargain."

"Yes, for I am certain I shall live to be an old woman. I feel as young as ever I felt; but I should not tell everyone so—and people paying an annuity are influenced by hope, and think their annuitants haven't ten years to live."

Doctor Blandly looked up with half-closed, critical eyes at Mrs. St. Cyr, shut

up his knife, put the stick in his pocket and asked quietly:

"How old are you?"

After a little hesitation, Mrs. St. Cyr replied:

"Forty-four."

"You are too stout. Do you suffer inconvenience from your stoutness?"

"No. Of course if I run up-stairs quickly, or over-exert myself, I feel it—then I have the palpitations."

Doctor Blandly never took his eyes from her face as she spoke.

"If I told you, madam, that you are likely to die suddenly—that you might not live twelve months, would that deter you from your scheme?"

"Not at all. On the contrary; if you could impress that on anyone wishing to sell an annuity, I should have a greater inducement in buying one, as I should get more for my money."

"You told me that you still loved your daughter; how is that consistent with your making an arrangement which will leave her penniless at your death."

"When I die my daughter will be well married, and in no need of my money."

"Is your daughter engaged?"

"Well—that is—not precisely."

Doctor Blandly was silent for a time, then:

"If I understand your character at all, Mrs. Brown, you wish to go into fashionable society in order that your daughter may secure a husband with a fortune; for this end you are ready to risk the loss of your whole fortune, and expose your daughter to the peril of absolute poverty."

"I see no risk."

"That is to say you are blind. But I trust for your daughter's sake you are not so perversely obstinate that you will not refuse to be led."

"Doctor Blandly, no one in the world can divert me from my intention of taking my daughter into society. It has been my constant solace in the weary solitude of these past years. It is now my proudest hope to see my child married and in a station worthy of her beauty and goodness. She shall not endure what I for her sake have endured."

"Then, madam, accept my second proposition. Draw from your capital as much as is necessary for this speculation; your daughter may marry before your decease; if not, she may have something left of your fortune to support her when you are gone."

"I will never be a burden on my daughter's generosity—never expose to the world the fact that her mother is not what she seemed."

"You oblige me to speak plainly. You will not live to be forty-five."

If the Doctor expected to terrify the widow by his brusque statement, and check her in a course which he saw might be ruinous to her child, he was mistaken. Mrs. St. Cyr smiled calmly and shook her head."

"I know better," she said.

"Ah!" muttered the Doctor. "Here is a type of woman I have seen before. Your fair, fat fool, complacent and self-satisfied, is as obstinately stubborn as a veritable pig."

Mrs. St. Cyr, on her side, was equally aggravated by the opposition of Doctor Blandly, which she conceived arose solely from his antipathy to women and natural perversity. She spoke tartly when next she opened her lips.

"I don't want to know what I am to do with my money. I want you to tell me how I am to obtain an annuity. And perhaps as you seem to think it will be

such a losing bargain for me ——" she paused.

"I know what you would say, madam. But I can assure you I have no taste for such commerce, and never hope to wish for the death of the meanest of God's creatures."

Mrs. St. Cyr rose hastily, as if to terminate the fruitless interview. Doctor Blandly calmly crossed his legs, set his elbow on the arm of his chair, rested his nose against his forefinger, and closing one eye looked thoughtfully at the floor with the other.

"There are scores of men," said he, as if talking to himself rather than to Mrs. Cyr, "scores of 'em who would jump at you and your ten thousand pounds, as a jack jumps at a gudgeon. With the doctor's certificate before them they would let you have what you want for your money; without a certificate dozens would take

your money and promise you your annuity. Dozens of 'em would rob you—fleece you—turn you inside out—and show you your folly for the mere asking. The scoundrels believe they are justified in robbing fools. But you must be saved from such a punishment as that."

Mrs. St. Cyr listened, and her indignation gave way to alarm. She looked at Doctor Blandly, and waited silently for him to end his cogitation and speak.

"Hum!" said he at length, raising his head and turning to Mrs. St. Cyr, without the slightest sign of ill-feeling or good-feeling in his expression. "Madam, I know several dealers—professional dealers in annuities, who would satisfy your demands with little question; but I know none whom I would trust. For myself, I am content to live without anxiety, and hope never more to receive a penny-piece at another's cost; but I am frequently

desired to show a good investment to people who, like yourself, fancy I may be of service to them. If I see a means of providing you with an annuity upon terms which I consider just and worthy, I will do my best to negotiate for you."

"Oh, Doctor Blandly, I did not expect this kindness from you."

"It is not kindness; common humanity will not suffer a man to see a snail crushed if he can help it," answered Doctor Blandly.

CHAPTER XII.

COUNSELS.

"I HOPE your interview has been satisfactory," said Tom, as he conducted Mrs. St. Cyr to the chaise.

"Yes, Mr. Talbot; Doctor Blandly has promised to assist me. That is especially satisfactory, because I feel perfectly certain that whatever he does in my behalf must be absolutely disinterested—disinterested humanity on his part."

Tom felt inclined to smile: it was so

clear that the Doctor had disclaimed any feeling of kindness towards the widow.

"It is difficult at first to know how to conduct oneself with Doctor Blandly," pursued Mrs. St. Cyr, "but when one gets accustomed to his—his original manner one cannot feel anything but respect for him, and confidence in his judgment."

"The better you know him the more you must admire him."

"As you see, I am not yet composed; indeed, I feel agitated to the last degree. Doctor Blandly has warned me of a great danger from which I should scarcely have escaped but for him. I cannot tell you how deeply grateful I am to you for the introduction, for not only my own welfare is concerned, but that also of my dear child. You will give me the opportunity of thanking you in a more elegant style

I hope soon. Shall we have the happiness of seeing you to-night?"

"I shall stay with Doctor Blandly until to-morrow, then I shall give myself the pleasure of visiting you. I have promised to procure a pair of skates for Lady Betty."

"We shall be enchanted to see you, and desolate until you come," said Mrs. St. Cyr, with a gracious bow, as the chaise moved on.

Doctor Blandly hastily changed his working costume, and in his best wig and plum-coloured coat stood at the door to receive Tom when he returned to the house.

"You have got rid of her, my boy," he asked.

"She is gone, Sir."

"That's a mercy. How long have you known her, Tom?"

"Since yesterday."

"Yesterday! and she had the audacity to speak of you as a dear friend, and the impudence to express pity for the Admiral! Well, she has one excuse, and that is scarcely sufficient — she is a fool, a downright fool, and an obstinate fool, and an ill-scented fool, too. If I had but known she was but an acquaintance, and not a dear friend, Tom, I'd be hanged if ——" Doctor Blandly paused.

"You would have refused to help her?"

"I won't say that, my boy, for these fools are to be pitied, Heaven help them! but it is hard that a man seeking peace and quiet can't get two minutes to himself. I shall have to see that woman again, more than once, perhaps. I had a kind of presentiment when I was shaving this morning that I ought to go for a day's fishing."

"And you stayed at home expecting me?"

"That's it. However, you shall pay for it. We will have dinner as soon as the light fades, and a clean hearth and the cribbage-board after. I will send round for Baxter, and he shan't go home till his wife comes for him. Now, my boy, lunch is waiting, and old Jerry is coming with the bottles."

"Here am I, master," said Jerry, coming up from the cellar with a basket which he carried as though it were of egg-shell china."

"What have you got there, Jerry, port?"

"Yes; two on 'em for you and two for Master Tom, to begin with, and I'll go down for the Madeiry as soon as I've got these safe out of my hands."

"I told you claret for lunch, you obstinate old man," said the Doctor.

"All in good time, Master; the port won't be a bit too warm by when it's wanted. They are out of that dark corner on the right hand, Master Tom, and you know I don't go there for every one. Lord, how you will enjoy yourselves presently, to be sure! Why, Master Thomas, you look more of a man than ever."

"There, go along, you old chatterer," said the Doctor, "and when you've brought up what wine you think fit to make us drink, lock the gate and tie up the bell."

"I'll do that first," said Jerry, in a serious tone.

"And don't you hear anyone calling or knocking until you see Baxter's red nose shining over the top of the gate."

"If Baxter is coming I shall have to bring up twice as much port, but he shall have his own bottles, and they won't

come from the dark corner. That parson would drink new port and not know the difference when he's playing cribbage."

Doctor Blandly laughed heartily at his servant's observation, and sat down to the table, which was bountifully covered with fish, flesh, and game.

It was not till the substantial meal was finished, and the two gentlemen had turned their chairs to the fire, that the Doctor could bring himself to speak with gravity upon any subject.

"Well, now," said he, when Jerry having arranged the sand bags in the windows, and placed the coal scuttle close to his master's hand, had withdrawn. "Now my boy, let us talk about your affairs."

Tom was silent; his thoughts naturally reverting to his father—the gallant old gentlemen whom he had seen so seldom; and of whom he knew so

little. The Doctor's thoughts turned also in the same direction, and he recalled his friend as he remembered him a gay, lively boy and fellow scholar. With a sigh and a quick movement of his head, he banished these reflections, and returned to the subject that had to be discussed.

"His will is there," said Doctor Blandly, taking a folded sheet of parchment from his pocket and laying it upon the table. "You will take it with you and read it at your pleasure, Tom. It is simple and clear. Excepting a few unimportant legacies your father has left all to you without restraint or stipulation as I told you in my letter."

"Is there no one to share it with me?"

"No one. Your mother died at your birth, and I never knew of any relations either on her side or your father's who

have any claim to participation. The lawyers have had the will in hand, and your signature alone is wanting to finish the formalities. Virtually, you are now in possession of the Kent estate, and property yielding nigh upon three thousand a year. I have visited Talbot Hall. You have a very good steward; his accounts are quite correct. The Hall itself stands in need of repairs—an expense which must be undertaken under any circumstances. The property is safely invested and all you have to settle is—what will you do with it?"

"That question has been continually in my mind since I received your letter, and I am unprepared with an answer to it now. I must follow in my father's footsteps, and be guided by you, if you will let me tax your kindness."

"Don't talk nonsense, Tom. You know that I should break my heart if you ceased

to accept my services. Are you tired of travel?"

"No, I prefer it to staying in one place."

"Good. You have to live another score of years before you can content yourself with a world bounded by four brick walls. Unfortunately a man cannot begin to enjoy his bachelor estate in its fullest comfort until he is fifty. He has to acquire sufficient wisdom. So you will travel again?"

"I have thought so."

"You can't do better. A young man with a decent appearance, an amiable condition, and money, is never safe. A designing woman can flatter him into the belief that she loves him better than anyone else, and he is betrayed by the generosity of his nature into offering her marriage. Then he is lost—made over hand and foot to the Philistines. I would

have every boy made to learn the history of Sampson by heart. Thanks to your natural taste for never staying in one place longer than half a day, you stand a good chance of being happy in your declining years. Of course, you have no intention of marrying?"

"None."

"And you do not feel disposed to live at Talbot Hall.

"No."

"Then my advice is, that as soon as you get tired of my port, you shall go abroad again."

Tom looked at the fire dreamily, without answering. He scarcely heeded what the Doctor was saying at that moment, for his hand which had slipped into his pocket rested on a shoe—the shoe Lady Betty had taken from her foot for his guide in the purchase of skates, and he was thinking of the winsome maid.

Doctor Blandly looked at him, and saw a smile play about his lips, and a soft tenderness in his eyes, which alarmed him.

"Hum! and where do you think of going next, my boy?" he asked briskly.

"I have not the slightest notion," Tom answered, arousing himself.

"I thought of going to South America next, but I have changed my mind. Somehow I seem to have lost my relish for new places, and the old—well, the best of the old is here, Doctor. Perhaps, after all, I shall stay a few months in England."

"What is that you keep turning over in your pocket?"

"A maid's shoe," answered Tom, drawing it out and looking at it with admiring eyes—"isn't it pretty?"

The Doctor took it in his hands, turned it over, and fiercely said:

"I'll be hanged if I think it a jot better looking than mine."

"I cannot agree with you," said Tom, laughing, as he slipped the shoe gently back into his pocket.

"That woman said she had a daughter; now I'll wager the shoe's hers."

"You win; it is."

"Ah! I thought so; a chip of the old block. Pretty of course, and a fool."

"On the contrary, I think she is clever."

"So much the worse—Baxters wife's clever."

Tom laughed.

"There the comparison ends," said he.

"Tom, I don't like it. The mother is designing, and has been pretty enough, and if the girl has as much cunning and more prettiness, she will just marry you for your money, if you give her the

chance. My boy, it is more necessary than ever that you should go to South America—to Jericho—anywhere, that you may be safe from a clever, pretty girl, whose very shoe-leather makes you forget that you are a man and a bachelor."

Tom thought a moment, then emptying his glass, he cried in a reckless spirit:

"Well, perhaps it will be wise. And what am I to do with all my money—that has yet to be settled."

"I can manage that for you, as I managed it for your father. I will let you know when you overdraw your income and trespass upon capital."

"No fear of that. My expenses will not increase. The money can accumulate, and when the time comes for me to write my last will and testament, I can settle it all on a charity."

"What could be better?" asked Doctor Blandly.

Perhaps Tom was thinking it might be better to leave it to one's own children than those of others, for he said somewhat sadly:

"And the Hall—one can't sell a house that has descended from father to son for a couple of hundred years."

"It may stand as a monument to their memory, my boy."

Tom nodded his head in thoughtful silence.

"And now I have to speak on another matter," said the Doctor, altering his amiable tone of voice and speaking with cold precision. "It is a subject which is new to you, and one that is unpleasant to broach; but it must nevertheless be discussed. Give me your close attention for a few minutes. During the later part of his life, your father paid an annual sum of four hundred pounds to two individuals—two hundred to each. It was

entirely an act of generosity on his part. He never mentioned the fact to you—he wished you not to know these individuals or their history. They themselves are ignorant of the source from which this annual payment arises. With the Admiral's death this payment naturally terminates, for they have no place in his will. He could not mention them, for that would have betrayed, or led to the betrayal of a secret which for your own peace of mind he wished you not to know. Nevertheless, I believe he would have you continue to make this small yearly allowance at my discretion. He might have simplified the matter by leaving me a sum to discharge this payment; but he had some forced notion of delicacy in doing that."

"Which I fully participate. It would be an ungenerous return for your kindness to make you appear his debtor."

"My boy, what on earth does it matter how we appear to others. We do our duty, we satisfy our own conscience, we sleep o' nights, and it matters nothing how we appear. We are not women."

"I do not wish to discover my father's secret," said Tom, after a few minutes' reflection; "but I should be glad to know if the amount paid to these two persons is sufficient for their wants. I would willingly double it."

"There is no necessity. One of them would not be satisfied with all your money, and I am sometimes inclined to stop his allowance altogether; the other is not in need of any assistance. Give them two hundred a year a-piece if you will, but give them no more."

"Be it so. And you will let me leave the disposition of my property in your hands to invest as you will, and take that difficulty off my hands?"

"Willingly."

Tom held out his hand, and pressed Doctor Blandly's in silent acknowledgement of his gratitude.

"One word to conclude that subject," said the Doctor, holding the young man's hand; "I shall write to the lawyers to morrow morning, and they in answer will fix a day for you to attend at Lincoln's Inn. I will bid them name a day as early as possible. Then your signatures being made, nothing need delay your departure. Until that time you will be my guest, will you not?"

"I have promised to visit Mrs. St. Cyr."

"Ah, I had forgotten that shoe. Well, well—return it as quickly as possible, and have no more to do with those designing persons than is absolutely necessary. Mark me—nothing good can come to you from that acquaintance. And now let

us talk of something more agreeable."

They chatted without interruption, until old Jerry on half entering the room said:

"Are you disengaged, master?"

"Yes, what is it?"

"I don't wish to trouble you, Sir. I can come again in five or ten minutes."

"What do you want to say?"

"It's only the parson. He's kicking at the gate. You can see him from the window."

"Open the gate at once; and look here, Jerry, my man; you will do well to have a little more respect for my visitors. If I was the parson, I'd never give you another sixpence."

"Lord love you, master," answered Jerry, lingering at the door, "I wonder who'd help him over the garden-wall when Mrs. Baxter comes to the garden-gate for

him if I was to forsake him in his hour of need. Hark to him, master!"

"Open the gate at once, you old fool! don't stand there grinning and rubbing your hands."

The Reverend Mr. Baxter, standing on tiptoe, whistled and knocked alternately to attract attention. From the window Tom could see his two hands clutching the top, and half of his jolly red face shining above it.

CHAPTER XIII.

PREMONITORY SYMPTOMS.

IT was with satisfaction that Tom Talbot found ice in the river when he rose the following morning. If the frost had broken he would not have been called upon to teach Lady Betty to skate, and nothing might have taken place to prevent his following the counsel of Doctor Blandly. Scraping the frost from the window, and looking over the gently undulating English landscape, where every twig and branch stood

out sharp and distinct against the still, cold sky; he had less desire than ever for the expansive grandeur and fervid mists of South America. Solitude had lost its sublimity—or sublimity its charms for him.

After breakfast he took the stage to London. He bought a pair of strong, useful skates for himself at the first shop he came to, but he found nothing sufficiently light and pretty for Lady Betty until he had examined the stock of half a dozen shops. It was half-past two when he reached the Chesnuts.

Lady Betty must have seen him coming, for the door opened before he reached it, and she ran to meet him, her open face aglow with sparkling delight. Suddenly she checked herself, seeming to remember that she was no longer a child, and waited for him to approach with a blush upon her cheek and eyes that sought now the

ground, now his face, in pretty bashfulness.

"You are glad to see me?" Tom said, looking in her face.

"Yes; and are not you glad to see me also?"

Tom did not answer; his tongue seemed to refuse its office.

"Are you afraid to flatter me?" asked she.

"Lady Betty," said he, "I know not how it comes that I am silent when I so wish to speak, unless it be that there are no words to express my happiness."

With a little cry of gratification Lady Betty slipped her hand under Tom's arm, and her step seemed to gain in elasticity.

"It is a new happiness to be so welcomed."

"Mamma says that Doctor Blandly was prodigiously glad to see you."

"Hum! why that's true," said Tom, with some hesitation; then, looking sideways at Lady Betty's face to see what there was in it which should make her greeting so much more effective than Doctor Blandly's, he added, "but your welcome is not the same as his, and you are not in the least like him."

"I am very glad of it if mamma's description of him is exact—she says he looks like an hostler and speaks like a bear," said Lady Betty, laughing.

At this moment they came to the door, where mamma stood prepared to receive him—all smiles and feathers.

"My dear Mr. Talbot, I am so overjoyed to see you. I hope you are quite well—and that dear old Doctor Blandly. I protest I am quite infatuated with him—his manly, straightforward way of speaking, and his honest English face, are ever present in my memory."

Lady Betty withdrew behind her mamma to hide her mirth, and put her finger on her lips as a signal of silence to Tom.

"Doctor Blandly is quite well," said Tom, "and he begged me to say that you need not trouble yourself to call upon him as he intends writing to you in the course of the day."

"It will be no trouble, but, on the contrary, a pleasure."

"I am afraid you would be disappointed if you went with the hope of seeing him, the—the bell is out of order, and—and when the Doctor is working in the garden he invariably — that is he will invariably have the front gate locked."

"Ah, he is a little shy at present, but I daresay that will wear off after we have exchanged a few letters."

Not to flatter Mrs. St. Cyr with delu-

sive hopes, Tom asked Lady Betty if she would take her first skating lesson before the light faded. Lady Betty wished for nothing better.

A man must have his wits about him to nicely adjust a skate on the small surface of a pretty girl's foot. Tom's wits deserted him from the moment he took Lady Betty's foot in his hand. He felt never more clumsy in his life. He grew warm, his fingers trembled and slipped, grazing his knuckles against the sharp steel; he twisted the straps, and buckled them first too loose then too tight; in a word, his bungling efforts were sufficient to tire one's patience, yet Lady Betty only laughed. She seemed to enjoy his confusion; she did not find fault or attempt to help him, though it was perfectly clear that she could have done the whole business for herself in a couple of minutes. It inspired her with

delightful hopes of conquest, to have him kneeling at her feet, for she was a tyrant at heart. And what man could she prefer for her slave to one who had vaunted his independence, and talked lightly of leaving her.

As for Tom, he felt he was no longer master of himself from the moment he bent his knee; but he took on his chains readily, not knowing how soon they would gall him.

"Thank you," said Lady Betty, when he had finished buckling on her skates, and proceeded to strap on his own; "my feet have given you a great deal of trouble."

"'Tis my faulty hand that gives me trouble, and not your foot—that is faultless."

"So I have been told," said Lady Betty, demurely.

Tom did not answer.

"Now who on earth can have told her so?" he asked himself, giving a vicious tug at his skate-straps; "clearly some one whose opinion she values. A woman would not be likely to tell her of her perfections. It must have been a man, and as she hasn't any relations, who the deuce has a right to pass remarks upon her feet?"

Women are quick to make deductions from the slightest actions of men in whom they take interest. Lady Betty drew her own conclusions from Tom's silence and that intemperate pull at his skate-straps. Had he looked up at that moment he would have seen mischief sparkling in her pretty eyes.

"I could make him wretchedly jealous if I chose," thought Lady Betty. The thought, however, was transitory, for she was eager to learn, and as Tom rose to his feet he found nothing but sweet ex-

pectancy in her face, and under the influence of her smile his brow grew smooth again.

"Give me your left hand, Lady Betty," he said, "now your right."

"What great, strong hands you have!"

"The better for serving you. Keep your arms firm. Your left foot forward, now your right, left—not too fast, left again—so!"

Lady Betty required little teaching, she was fearless and quick, and following Tom's movements, she got on rapidly. After a time, Mrs. St. Cyr came to the edge of the pond and regarded her daughter's movements with proud satisfaction.

"There, mamma, what do you think of that?" asked Lady Betty, when Tom led her up to Mrs. St. Cyr.

"Prodigious, my love!" answered Mrs. St. Cyr. "The grace and the elegance

are astonishing, and I am not in the least surprised that the skating has become a fashionable pastime. I hear, Mr. Talbot, that the Prince has performed the cotillions in company with the Duchess of Donegal, and Mrs. FitzHerbert, upon the waters at Windsor."

"Very likely, madam, I have seen women, carrying baskets of butter on their heads, skate to market in the low countries," answered Tom.

"Take me away again," cried Lady Betty impatient of delay, "the sun is already behind the trees"

Mrs. St Cyr stood on the bank, watching the skaters until her feet were numbed, and she had reason to fear that the end of her nose was growing vulgarly red, when she waved an adieu and returned to the house, leaving the young people to follow by themselves—an arrangement which agreed well with their inclinations.

"Am I a good pupil?" asked Lady Betty, when the dark compelled them to leave the ice, and Tom was removing her skates.

"You are too apt. I fear you will be able to dispense with your teacher too soon."

"You were anxious to leave me, and only undertook to teach me by compulsion, I believe. Have you abandoned your intention of leaving England soon?"

"To tell you the truth, I was never so disinclined to leave it. After another lesson you will be able to skate alone; then I shall have no excuse for staying here."

"Oh! I can supply you with as many excuses as you need. In the first place, I do not want to skate alone—in the second, it would not be safe for me—I should be nervous and timid the moment

I felt there was no one to save me if I were in peril."

"You do not seem wanting in courage."

"That is because you mistake my confidence in you for self-reliance. I should never feel afraid while a gentleman was near me."

"I am afraid you flatter our sex unduly. We are not all to be trusted in emergency. In danger women are frequently braver than men."

"*I* don't think so," Lady Betty said emphatically.

"You judge men by the fictions they have written of their own heroism; I judge by experience."

"So do I," said Lady Betty, drily.

Tom looked at her in surprise and found her with her eyes fixed on the path they were treading, and the delicate lines of her brows bent in a frown.

"There were twenty-one of us," pursued Lady Betty. "Some girls of my own age, others older, and three governesses, as old and as tough as—as Oliver Cromwell; regular Ironsides all three. We were out taking the air, and had to cross the Lea river by one of the lock gates. There were two boards and an iron rail. We were told to hold the rail in crossing with both hands—and that was just sufficient to make me not hold it at all, as there happened to be a gentleman on the bank looking at us. And I tripped over a horrid nail, and fell in.

"The young girls cried, the elder hid their faces in their hands, and the three governesses fainted away—and I was left in the water to get out by my own efforts or drown. Luckily Philip Norman saved me. And so, Mr. Talbot, I think my experience proves by twenty to one, that

female courage is less reliable than you think it."

"Philip Norman was the name of the fellow on the bank who looked at you as you were crossing, I suppose?"

"It was!" answered Lady Betty, in a grave voice, casting a rapid glance at Tom's sombre face. "And I shall never forget him," she added, bending her head to conceal the merry twinkling mischief of her eyes.

"Lucky rascal," muttered Tom. "Well, of course, the girls couldn't swim; and if there was a man there he was compelled, in common decency, to plunge in and rescue you."

"Yes," Lady Betty said, with a soft sigh.

"He would have deserved a thrashing if he had not."

From Tom's tone of voice it seemed as if he thought Philip Norman ought to

have a thrashing all the same for having done his duty. Lady Betty who felt as if she were being tickled in church, had the utmost difficulty to keep a grave face. She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and sighed again.

"He did not lose his life in saving yours, did he?" Tom asked, remarking this sign of grief.

Lady Betty shook her head in silence, and turned her face aside.

"Then hang him!" said Tom, to himself. "She knows his name, so it is clear he took advantage of the accident to repay himself for his trouble."

"I haven't seen him for three months," said Lady Betty, her face still averted, and a corner of her handkerchief in her mouth.

"You saw him frequently afterwards, then?"

"Every week," murmured Lady Betty,

her shoulders making a convulsive movement which passed well for subdued grief, but owed its origin to suppressed laughter. Tom's tone increased in moody suspicion with each word.

"You saw him every week—here?" he asked.

"No. Mamma has never seen him."

"A clandestine affair!" said Tom to himself. "It is scandalous the amount of harm that is done to simple girls by the neglect of those to whom they are entrusted by over-confiding parents. Here is some idle vagabond ogling a girl's school, when fortune gives him the opportunity of fishing a girl out of the water. He presumes upon the impression this trivial service has upon her romantic disposition, to contract an acquaintance with her, unknown to her mother. He deserves to be kicked!"

Lady Betty had changed her elastic step for one of sentimental slowness.

Tom broke the silence.

"I suppose this young man, this Philip Norman, has no occupation?"

"He is only a poor artist. But if you please we will change the subject. Let us talk of something more interesting to you."

"No subject can be more interesting than that which concerns Lady Betty's happiness."

Lady Betty made a courtesy, drew a long sigh, put her handkerchief in her pocket, and in a tone of assumed cheerfulness, observed that she thought it would freeze again in the night.

"I am of your opinion," answered Tom, and then relapsing into silence, he said to himself: "An artist. I know the sort of man—waving hair over his shoulders, moustaches and a chin tuft, after the style

of Vandyke—a big hat and a ribbon to his breeches. And I'm to take his place and to amuse my Lady Betty until she makes another romantic attachment. Ha! we shall see. Perhaps I'm not such a weak fool as she thinks me. By George, I wish the frost would break, I would be off by the first vessel that leaves the docks!"

"Is it colder than this in Russia?" asked Lady Betty, demurely.

"Yes—considerably."

Silence again, while Tom continued his train of thought. "I would like to see the fellow though, just to tell him what I think of him. A poor innocent, thoughtless child—she is scarcely more! By heaven! I would have him out on the grass if he dared to come within five miles of her after I have warned him off."

"I don't think we shall have snow," observed Lady Betty.

With a struggle Tom brought himself to talk upon meteorology, and they were still exchanging questions and answers on this expansive subject when they reached the house.

CHAPTER XIV.

"THE BEST LAID SCHEMES."

MRS. ST. CYR was in her room reading a letter which had been delivered by old Jerry, with a brief message to the effect that Doctor Blandly did not require an answer.

The letter ran thus :

"Edmonton, December 15th, 1800.

"Madam,

"If you are yet minded to invest your money in an annuity, you may take your papers to Mr. Goodman, of Lincoln's Inn, whom I have instructed by letter to-day

to pay you the sum of eight hundred pounds per annum during the term of your life, in consideration of receiving the capital which you purpose sinking. Proper guarantees being exchanged, you will be entitled to draw your first quarterly payment on the 24th day of this month. This you may do if you will, but I repeat that it is directly opposed to your own interests, as I judge them, and to my advice. Your heirs can claim nothing at your death, even though accident or disease should terminate your existence on the day of signing the contract.

"If you will be guided by reason—live plainly, avoid excitement, and draw what income is necessary for your wants from your capital without investing it unwisely in an annuity.

"I am, Madam,

"Your servant,

"BENJAMIN BLANDLY."

"A very satisfactory letter indeed!" said Mrs. St. Cyr to herself, as she folded the letter after reading it. "It seems too good to be true. Eight hundred a year is at least two more than I expected, and more than I should have been likely to get from anyone else.

"I have made a prodigious good bargain for a certainty, thanks to the old gentleman's high opinion of himself and his own judgment. I suppose I looked anxious and pale at our interview—indeed I felt exceedingly uncomfortable, what with the smoke from his horrid bonfire, his unpleasant behaviour, and the fear that he would discover the scent he objected to was my essence of musk and caromandel. I never had any serious illness. I never felt better in my life than at present, and as to disease—the most objectionable word he could possibly find—it is a preposterous suppo-

sition. I am a little stouter than I could wish, but that is because I am, if anything, too robust in health. If I had known that he would grant me an annuity, I should have taken pains to appear more delicate than I feel, an attack of the palpitations in his presence might have procured me another hundred a year. However, I have every reason to be satisfied. With eight hundred a year one can live in a very genteel style."

Mrs. St. Cyr read the letter through once more, then hearing voices in the room below, she hastily slipped it into a drawer, locked it up carefully, and descended to the drawing-room.

She was too occupied with her own affairs, and elated with the prospect of speedily realising her long cherished hopes, to notice that Tom and Lady Betty were more silent than usual—indeed she

allowed them no scope for exercising their conversational powers, for no sooner had she entered the room than she began to speak upon the subject uppermost in her mind, with a volubility which might be likened to a torrent into which side streams naturally flow and lose their individuality.

"Embrace me, my love," she said to Lady Betty, "embrace me. I have received a most satisfactory letter from Doctor Blandly, and my fondest wishes may be put into execution immediately. Mr. Talbot, you will excuse me for introducing my personal affairs before you; but I am sure you will be interested in that which concerns the welfare of my darling child and myself."

"Madam, I can assure you I feel——"

"Oh, you have a right to my confidence, for you have been instrumental in

producing my felicity, and I regard you as a dear relative and an old friend rather than a new acquaintance. I cannot tell you how highly I appreciate your friendship, but you can understand how deeply grateful I am to Providence that sent you to my assistance, when I tell you that without you my dear child and I might have been utterly ruined."

"Oh, mamma—ruined!"

"Kiss me, my darling, it is the truth; but for Doctor Blandly's intervention I should have placed the whole of my fortune and yours in the hands of some one who would have robbed us. We are singularly placed, Mr. Talbot. I have neither relations nor friends on whose judgment I can rely. My only acquaintances are one or two neighbouring families, composed of women that are perfectly idiotic, and men who are no better. I have lived in a state of isolation while my child has been at school,

and we know absolutely no gentlemen—do we, Betty?"

Lady Betty did not reply.

Tom, coming with chivalrous promptitude to her assistance, said:

"I am sure any man so fortunately placed as myself, could do no less than——"

"Mr. Talbot, you have given such proof of disinterested regard for us two unfriended women that it would be unjust for us to place you in the same category with ordinary acquaintances. You are our friend, a dear friend on whose support and guidance I feel that we may rely with confidence in the critical position we shall shortly occupy, and, as a friend, I shall claim rather than solicit your assistance."

"But, mamma, you have not asked Mr. Talbot whether——"

Mrs. St. Cyr sealed her daughter's

lips with a kiss, and said, in a gentle tone:

"Do not interrupt me, darling. Give me your best attention, my charmer, for this is a subject which closely concerns yourself. The questions I have to put to Mr. Talbot will come in their fitting place. My husband, Mr. Talbot, died while Lady Betty was still an infant. The fortune he left was not large enough to permit of retaining a large establishment, and I had no longer the inclination to live in a grand style.

"I was a young mother and a young widow, and you can well imagine that in my position the only thought I had was for my child. To provide for her future was my first care, and I retired at once to this secluded part. I placed my money in the public funds, drawing only sufficient to provide for my own wants and Lady Betty's educa-

tion in order that principle and interest should accumulate, so as to allow of her taking a suitable position in society when she left school. Anxious to obtain as large an income as posible, I intended to remove my capital from the bank and place it in the hands of a financial agent, who would invest it to the best advantage.

"You now see the risk to which I should have exposed myself, but for Doctor Blandly. He kindly warned me against the public adventurer, and promised to find, if he could, some profitable and safe investment. That promise he kept, and this afternoon he writes to inform me that I may rely on receiving eight hundred pounds a year for the use of my capital. I shall accept his offer without hesitation."

"You may do so with perfect confidence," said Tom; "your property

in his hands will be as safe as if it were his own. Not only will the interest be promptly paid, but the capital, should you wish to withdraw it, will——"

"I am perfectly satisfied," Mrs. St. Cyr, said hastily. "And now, Mr. Talbot, we come to a more interesting part of the subject. I am to receive my first quarterly payment on the ensuing quarter-day."

"That is to say, three months from the present date."

"No; on the twenty-fourth of this month. Is that unusual, Mr. Talbot?"

"I have never known interest on capital to be paid in advance, although I believe payment is occasionally made on annuities, on the day of capital being transferred; but I know little if anything about financial arrangements, and

I can quite believe that Doctor Blandly would procure all the advantage for you——"

"Precisely; that undoubtedly accounts for everything. What a dear, good man!" Mrs. St. Cyr gave a deep sigh of satisfaction as this dangerous point was rounded, and proceeded, "I am to conclude the business through Mr. Goodman, of Lincoln's Inn."

"Doctor Blandly's solicitor. I myself am to see him shortly."

"He is a trustworthy man, of course. For although I have no hesitation in telling you my affairs, I should not like them divulged, you understand."

"Mr. Goodman is as discreet as Doctor Blandly himself."

"How charming it is to have to do business with such people! Well, Mr. Talbot, I intend to carry out my pur-

pose without delay. I shall sell this house at once."

"My poor pigeons!" sighed Lady Betty.

"My darling, you are no longer a child. Pigeons are very well in a pasty, or as a side dish!"

"Fancy my Maggie as a side dish! I will never eat pigeons again. Go on, mamma. I will bid my pets good-bye to-morrow."

"With the proceeds of the sale one might buy a very elegant chariot and pair —a rich yellow chariot. What do you think, Mr. Talbot?"

"I think it is quite possible, madam."

"With respect to a house. I cut an advertisement from 'The Times' newspaper which I think very appropriate. I have it here in my purse. You are near the light, will you read that

and tell me what you think of it."

Tom took the cutting, and read it with some perplexity.

"Will you be good enough to read it aloud for Lady Betty's benefit?" said Mrs. St. Cyr.

"'It is pleasing to observe in these enlightened times,'" Tom read, "'that the eulogies of all classes hath been bestowed upon Dr. Solomon's Cordial Balm of Gilead and Elixer of Guaiacum, prepared only at the repertorium, and considered by the faculty as the most soothing——'"

Mrs. St. Cyr interrupted him, and with many apologies for her mistake, produced and offered the advertisement she intended for him; he read it aloud while Lady Betty smothered her laughter.

"'To be let, from Christmas, a neat

house, known as Mr. Johnson's, Park Lane, suitable to a modern genteel family, at a rental of ninety-five pounds per annum.'"

"That is it. What do you think of Park Lane, Mr. Talbot?"

"It is a very agreeable part of London."

"I am delighted with your approval, and if you will be so good as to escort us we will go and see it to-morrow. I hope and trust it may not be taken. I shall want some additions in the way of furniture, but as I am pretty well supplied with china, that will not cost me a great deal. You think I have enough china to appear genteel, Mr. Talbot?"

"Ample," said Tom, and he added to himself, "and enough besides for a genteel museum."

"Well then, I consider the house in

Park Lane as good as taken and furnished, and all that we now want is an agreeable circle of acquaintances — and that, Mr. Talbot, I shall count upon your successful efforts to obtain."

At this moment dinner was announced, and whatever Tom might have had to say in objection to this arrangement, remained unsaid, for Lady Betty, who had a capital appetite, which she was not ashamed of, rose from her seat with a cry of satisfaction as soon as the maid appeared at the door.

In obedience to the dictates of "good breeding," Mrs. St. Cyr gave a general turn to conversation, and allowed it to meander slowly along during the repast, without either hindrance or assistance from herself—her mind still being engrossed in the one great scheme of her life.

The moment they returned to the drawing-room she re-opened the subject with renewed vigour, starting with the assumption that Tom had agreed to give his time to making acquaintances at the clubs, coffee-houses, and assemblies, whom he would forthwith introduce to the ladies in their new home, the neat house in Park Lane.

Tom would have been dull indeed had he not detected from Mrs. St. Cyr's observations the principal object she had in view, and that did not encourage him to look more favourably at the prospect of a season in London.

"Hum!" said he to himself. "Perhaps I shall be lucky enough to meet with Lady Betty's interesting preserver—the artist she has lost sight of for three months, and when she has him at her feet, and as many suitors besides as I

can rake together, I may be permitted to retire from the scene."

Tom's discontent was stimulated by perceiving that his gloom served only to divert Lady Betty. She had seated herself at the table with paper and pencil at the commencement of the evening, and devoted herself to sketching; but more than once when she raised her head their eyes met, and he found a merry twinkle in hers which he knew was not provoked by any mirthfulness in his. His dulness was at length perceived by Mrs. St. Cyr, who taking it as a sign that he would be glad of a little variety, brought her discourse to a conclusion with a sigh.

"My love, what have you been designing?" she asked of Lady Betty.

"A portrait from memory, mamma dear — the portrait of a dear, dear friend."

Tom pricked his ears, for Lady Betty's voice was sad.

"Let me look at it, my sweet one. Lady Betty has great skill with the pencil, and excels in the water-colours—she has taken several prizes, and been highly complimented by her master. Oh, my dear! this is too bad of you—you are really too satiric! Yet 'tis an excellent portrait of the dear old gentleman, I protest. Mr. Talbot, you shall give me your opinion of the production."

The sketch was a spirited caricature of an elderly gentleman in an antiquated costume.

"It is admirably drawn, and very droll," said Tom. "Do I understand that it is the portrait of a friend?"

"The portrait of her own drawing-master—the brother of the ladies at

whose school Lady Betty has received her education. But he is something more to her than a teacher, for when she was quite a child he saved her from drowning."

"With a boat hook!" exclaimed Lady Betty, clasping her hands in mock emotion.

"And his name is Philip Norman. I trust, my love, he has got better of the lumbago."

"What a fool I have been?" said Tom to himself. Then his spirits revived; he became gay, and spoke of the coming events in London with positive enthusiasm.

When they separated for the night—Mrs. St. Cyr being occupied in trimming the wick of the candle for Tom's use—Lady Betty gave her hand to him, and said in a low voice and with an arch smile:

"You will never be jealous again?"

And he answered, "Never;" snatching her finger tips to his lips, and pressing a silent kiss upon them, while his very soul seemed to flame in his eyes.

Never! What solemn word is more lightly used?

CHAPTER XV.

THE ESTABLISHMENT IN PARK LANE.

"MY love!" said Mrs. St. Cyr to Lady Betty, as she sat surrounded by her china in the drawing-room of the neat house in Park Lane, "I must admit that I am greatly disappointed in Mr. Talbot."

"Why, mamma? He has not altered."

"That is precisely my reason for feeling disappointment. Except that he has had his hair cut in accordance

with the fashion, he is not a pin better than he was the first day we saw him. He dresses as plainly as a Quaker, and he absolutely laughs at the Prince of Wales. Now what sort of society is likely to be introduced to us by a man who makes a mock of the finest gentleman in Europe?"

"He has introduced us to all the friends he knows in London."

"And we should have been quite as well without them. Two of them were bearded like savages, a third could talk of nothing but the wild beasts he had shot in foreign parts, a fourth wore a coat that was threadbare, and their main object seemed to be to eat as much as possible at dinner, and make fun of the aristocracy. I declare Mr. Talbot seems to draw his friends from the meanest classes of

society, and I consider he is wanting in respect to bring such men here at all."

"He only did it to oblige you; he appears ill at ease the whole time they are with us."

"It is as much on their account as ours."

"Possibly. But he warned us that his friends were unused to ladies' society. You have one consolation, mamma—from the evident satisfaction these gentlemen had in bidding us adieu, it was clear that they intended never to trouble us again with their society."

"'Tis extremely provoking. Here have we been in London a month, with one of the handsomest chariots in the West End, a servant in livery, a home furnished at an expense which I should have considered it impossible to incur,

spent all our available money and got into debt besides, and haven't seen a man that's worth more than eighty pounds a year."

"You forget Mr. Talbot, whom we see every day."

"My love, we did not go to all this expense for him. In my opinion, you might have made him engage himself to you before ever we left Winchmore."

"It is not too late now, mamma, perhaps."

"There is no doubt he would marry you to-morrow, if you encouraged him, but you know that I have more expanded views. I would have you marry a title, my love—with money of course, and it is for that purpose alone I came to London, and undertook all these terrible expenses. Why do you shake your head, my dear?"

"Because I think you are not quite truthful in saying that."

"I admit I anticipated certain pleasures for myself—but what have we found? What enjoyment is there in riding about in our chariot when there is not a soul to bow to?"

"I find enjoyment in looking about me—in seeing people and rich dresses—in feeling the fresh air—in the rapid motion—in everything."

"That is the fault of youth—when you get my age——"

"I hope I shall be just as faulty," said Lady Betty, concluding Mrs. St. Cyr's sentence, and laughing cheerfully.

"'Tis no better at the play-house," continued Mrs. St. Cyr, still in a tone of discontent. "What is the use of a side-box? I protest we should be as well off in the pit."

"Better for seeing, I think."

"People who can afford the side boxes don't go to the play to see so much as to be seen; to run in and out of each other's boxes, banging the doors to attract attention."

"I never enjoyed anything more than 'The Road to Ruin.'"

"And I never anything less. A comedy they called it. It might have been the most doleful tragedy for any amusement I could find in it. I felt perfectly wretched to see everyone laughing, staring at each other, and nodding at friends. When people spy at us through their glasses, 'tis with a kind of who-the-Dickens-can that-be look on their faces, and no one even bowed to us, except one of Mr. Talbot's bearded savages in the back row of the pit; a fine compliment indeed—and I with feathers on my head that cost twelve pounds."

"Perhaps he would not have bowed,

if they had not attracted his observation."

"That is not what we are talking about. I repeat I have reason to be disappointed in Mr. Talbot. I am sure I miss no opportunity of hinting my wishes to him, but he takes no notice. He will *not* be gay and spirited."

Mrs. St. Cyr fanned herself in silence for a minute, then continued:

"A gentleman with money can always make friends. If he would only go into some of the card-rooms—Brook's or White's, he would find many fine gentlemen only too glad to make his acquaintance."

"Gentlemen seeking his acquaintance because he has money, would do so chiefly because they have none; and they are not the kind of gentlemen you wish to know."

"There you are in error. These fine

gentlemen without money are bound to know fine gentlemen with money, or they could not live at all; and when they cannot afford to pay for a dinner to their rich friends, they are only too glad to take them to dine at somebody else's expense. And that is how your fine gentleman without money makes himself useful, and contrives to keep himself in favour with all parties."

Lady Betty laughed.

"I see nothing to laugh at, my love. As I have said—all I can do by hinting I have done without effect; and I think you now ought to suggest in a pleasant manner to Mr. Talbot, that you would like him to go to the card-rooms and—and——"

"Lose his money in making friends to be his rivals--hey, mamma? Well, I will—that is he knocking at the door now—I will ask him when he comes in."

"Then for Heaven's sake let me get out of the room as quickly as possible!" cried Mrs. St. Cyr, starting up from her seat in alarm.

CHAPTER XVI.

TOM PROPOSES—LADY BETTY DISPOSES.

LADY BETTY was tambouring, she continued working with a grave expression on her young face until the door opened and Tom Talbot entered the room; then she raised her head, stuck her needle in the canvas, and holding out her hand, welcomed the friend with a smile.

"Come and sit beside me. I have something to say to you. Mamma and I have been talking about you. She has this moment left the room."

Tom seated himself on the sofa by her side, while she taking her needle again, resumed her work.

"Do you know mamma's motive in coming to London—in spending more than she can afford—in keeping a yellow chariot, and selling my poor pigeons?" she asked, when Tom after making a few conventional remarks, waited for her to speak.

"I believe I do," he replied.

"She wishes me to marry well."

"No one knowing you could wish anything else than that, Lady Betty."

"The difficulty is to find a suitable husband for me. The friends she knew fourteen years ago are dispersed and lost. She knows no one except the gentlemen you have introduced, and they are not altogether satisfactory—from her point of view."

"Her point of view may not be yours,

and it is you who are chiefly to be considered."

"I may not agree with mamma on all points, but I am quite at one with her in regarding your friends as unmarriageable. Is there any one of them whom you would have tried to make my husband?"

"No; but I would not willingly give your hand to the noblest, worthiest man in the world, though he were my dearest friend."

A smile stole over Lady Betty's face as she leaned over her tambour.

"Mamma wishes you to go to one of the card clubs and find me a husband there."

"Does Mrs. St. Cyr take me for a perfect fool?" asked Tom, with a laugh.

Lady Betty made no reply, but worked on steadily.

"It is odd," continued Tom; "I was at White's last night, and lost fifty guineas to the prettiest gentleman in the room. A charming man—handsome, polite, refined, and becoming the dress of a gentleman so well as to force one to admiration. I never lost my money so willingly in my life, and when we parted I begged him to exchange cards that we might meet again under more amiable conditions."

"Do you intend to see him a second time?" asked Lady Betty, looking up from her work.

"I have seen him a second time. I sought him this morning, so much had he fascinated me. We walked together in the park, and separated—ten minutes since, and not a hundred yards from this house."

Lady Betty returned to her embroi-

dery, and worked in silent thoughtfulness.

"He is exactly the kind of man your mamma is continually talking to me about, the sort of man she would make you marry if she could, and for that reason I did not ask him to come with me here."

"That was ungenerous," Lady Betty said, calmly.

"It is ungenerous, selfish, mean—what you will," he cried; "say that withal I lose my self-esteem—what then? A man will sacrifice more than that to possess a diamond, and if he will sacrifice so much for a mere stone that has its value in so many pounds, shillings and pence, shall I hesitate at losing so little to gain that which is above all price!"

He took her hand from the frame and pushed the tambour away, and

she, awed by the earnestness with which he spoke, and the passion which burned in his eye and trembled on his lips, looked with large-eyed wonder in his pale face.

"I have thought of you day and night," he continued, "and tried not to think. I have left this house saying, 'I will return no more,' and ere the night had come counted the hours until morning, impatient to see you again. I have said, 'I will not love,' and I love."

"You frighten me, and you are crushing my hand."

"I am not master of myself," he said, relaxing his close grasp, yet retaining her hand between his palms with a gentleness that corresponded to the tender tone to which his voice sank; "I did not intend to say what I have said; 'tis my heart

and not my brain that governs my will."

"Would you unsay your words?"

"Not for the world," he cried, quickly; "I say again—I love you, dear."

He did not fall upon his knee, he did not attempt to kiss her, for there was no blush upon Lady Betty's cheek, no bashful yielding of her eyes, to show a responding love. Lady Betty was struggling to overcome her astonishment, and look at the situation in a clear and reasonable manner.

"Say something to me, dear; do not look at me in such chilling silence."

"I do not understand; I am still confused," said Lady Betty, touched by the sadness of Tom's voice, and the piteous supplication in his eyes as he

looked upon her blank face. "Tell me why you wished to leave me if you loved me, and why, loving me, you wished not to love me."

"It was because I feared I could not make you happy, the end of loving being marriage and life-long union. Our tastes, I saw, were at variance. The whirl of life and fashion that you sigh to gain I thought I might sigh to quit."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lady Betty, her eyes quickening with intelligent light.

"But that is a trifle. I can conform my tastes with yours, make your pleasures mine; follow the world from London to Cheltenham, Cheltenham to Bath, and dress myself, if you will, in any extravagance that fashion invents. What will that matter if I love?"

Lady Betty looked at Tom no longer with astonishment or coldness in her eyes, but in kind compassion and tender sympathy; yet he dared not take her in his arms.

"Tom," she said, after a moment's silence, and she spoke with frank freedom, "Tom, I love you better than anyone in the world, and so I will not conceal a single thought from you. You have made a woman of me, and in a few words taught me to look at the great event of a woman's life seriously, as one should look at it. I have talked of marriage as a school-girl and a child, with no thought for the time when the orange-blossom fades."

She felt the two strong hands trembling above and below her fingers; she took her disengaged hand and laid it upon the back of his.

"I have said I love you better than

any one in the world—that may be no flattery to you," she said, with brief return to her customary tone of badinage, "for you have taken pains to show me only your least attractive friends, but I do not love as you love. I forget you frequently, and if I do foolish or ungenerous things it is not for your sake. 'Tis gratitude more than anything that animates me, a maturer form of cupboard love, the affection of children for those who make them presents and take them about to spectacles. I am thoughtless, hair-brained — neither wise nor experienced, yet I feel that if I loved as you love, and my soul were bound to a dead heart that absorbed the generous warmth and returned none, I should wish myself dead."

"But yours is no dead heart, 'tis one that even now responds to mine; its warmth is in this gentle

hand, in your cheek, and moistening eye."

Lady Betty shook her head. "You mistake my sentiment," said she. "Be guided by your sense, Tom. What am I? A young and untried girl. I have flesh and blood like yours, and one day I too may love with all my soul—wildly, irrationally, desperately, even to the loss of all I hold now most dear. And if the one I love is not my husband, what happiness in this world can there be for him or me? No, Tom, dear—for I may call you by that name and not be misunderstood, feeling so tenderly towards you, sympathising with you, quite yearning for your happiness, as I do—it would be the cruellest, most heartless act of my life to accept your love, to give you my hand, doubting as I doubt."

"Do not think of me," Tom cried, "or

if you will, think only of the happiness you can give me. I ask for no more love than you have now. It is more than ten thousand wives have to give their husbands. Think only of yourself, and that in marrying me you secure a faithful friend whose only thought will be to make you happy."

"And looking at it from that selfish point of view, can I believe that you will make me happy?"

"Can you doubt it?"

"Yes. You are twenty times more jealous than the Moor in the play. You are angry if a man looks at me —though I do you the justice to think you would be equally angry if they didn't—you look as if you would like to kill the young gentlemen who put up their glasses at me in the crush-room of the theatre, and will find a dozen excuses to avoid passing a knot of

dandies in the park. That amuses me very much now, and I may tell you that I take a great delight in making you fume with rage against some poor harmless military gentleman, or over-dressed fop; but I assure you it would distress me greatly to be doubted if I were your loyal wife."

"I will cure myself of jealousy—'tis a contemptible, unmanly fault," cried Tom.

"Do, Tom," said Lady Betty, withdrawing her hand, and subtly drawing the tambour frame between herself and him, while he was still thinking over his own failing. "Do, and by the time you *have* overcome that weakness, if I am not married to somebody else, it is very possible I shall be glad to marry you."

She said this with a light laugh, and her fingers were once more engaged upon the tambour.

CHAPTER XVII.

GERARD CREWE.

TOM TALBOT sat in his chamber with a book in his hand. Suddenly he closed the work and flung it to the other end of the room, albeit it was the "Paradise Lost" of John Milton, and deserved more reverential treatment. But when a man is disgusted with himself, Paradise itself would fail to please him.

"I deserve contempt," said he, "for who with a spark of manliness would

grudge a sweet girl the homage she deserves, or descend to mean shifts for depriving her of admiration. And how on earth can a woman love a man she cannot respect? What is the hour? Two. I will find Mr. Crewe, and induce him to go with me to Park Lane this very day."

Tom caught up his hat—made a couple of strides towards the door, paused with his hand on the latch a moment, then turned about, looked at his legs, at his sleeves, and at the reflection of his face in the glass at the other end of the room.

The result of this inspection was that he made his way into the adjoining chamber, where he changed his breeches half-a-dozen times, tried the effect of every coat he had in his closet, and spent a quarter of an hour in arranging the curls of his hair.

"There's no reason why we shouldn't start fair," said he.

In pursuance of this idea he entered the shop of a dealer in fashionable trifles, on his way to Gerard Crewe's house, and demanded a walking stick of the kind most used.

"Ah! this is too short by four inches; it would do for a boy, but it is of no use at all to me."

"I'm sorry I have none other, Sir," said the dealer, "but long sticks went out of fashion last year, and short sticks are in. I may be able to let you have a long stick next week—if the fashion should change."

"If it is the fashion—I'll have it, though I have to walk with it like a monkey."

"The stick is not used to walk with now, but to carry under the arm."

"Ah! then the shorter the better. A

little extension of the fashion and one may carry one's walking stick in the breeches' pocket."

"Just so, Sir. We must live in hope, Sir. Eye-glasses are in again, Sir."

"Thank God, I can do without them."

"Pardon me, Sir. No one can do without a glass now. They are not for the wearer's eye, but for the eye of the public, and are intended to hang down gracefully from the fob."

"Then hang me a glass from my fob."

"Now, Sir—there—so you look quite the go. You have a snuff box, I presume?"

"I never take snuff."

"Not take snuff! Dear me, Sir, where have you been these last three months?"

"Give me a snuff box and some snuff," said Tom, with a gulp.

"There's a beauty, Sir, for ten guineas—worth twelve."

"That will do—where is the snuff?"

"The apprentice has gone out to the 'bacconists to buy it, Sir."

By the time the apprentice returned Tom had purchased two finger rings, a diamond for his cravat, and half a dozen seals to keep company with his glass, and with these acquisitions he left the shop, highly gratified with his purchases.

At Gerard Crewe's house he was informed by the servant, who answered his knock, that Mr. Crewe had gone to take the air in the park, as was his daily habitude from the hour of two till four, when he was not detained at home by visitors.

Tom made his way to the park, where

he was fortunate enough to meet his new acquaintance—whose tall, graceful figure he detected in the distance the moment he passed the King's Gate. He was alone, walking with his hands crossed at his back, and looking from side to side of the alley as he passed slowly along.

Tom pursued and came up to him as he stopped in front of a thorn whose buds were just pushing through the sheaf.

The greeting of the men was warm for those who had so recently become acquainted.

"I hoped to meet you to-day," said Gerard, "indeed, I hoped to see you yesterday, but was disappointed. You were not at Brooke's last night.

"No You were?"

"I am there every night."

"You like play."

"On the contrary, I dislike it as much as any man can."

"That is a strange reason for frequenting a gaming-house."

"Not at all; for it is because I dislike play that I win. Success or failure never excites me. I play with unvarying equanimity, and that gives me an advantage over the generality of players. I should not have won your money had our tempers been alike."

Tom looked at his companion and was silent. Gerard, with perfect calm upon his pale thin face, walked along with his hands still behind him. After a few moments' silence, he continued:

"Mr. Talbot, I am a gambler—not in the ordinary sense. I do not play from infatuation, weakness, inclination. I have no such excuse—I play from purely mercenary motives—and the only difference between me and the common

wretch who plays with three cards at a fair is, that I use no fraud."

"Why have you told me this?" asked Tom.

"Because, in the grasp of your hand, in the expression of your eyes, I have found a warmth something more than common; because if we are to be friends, it is necessary you should know at the outset, what sort of man I am."

"Your honesty, at least, commands respect; and there's my hand again, Sir, as a proof that my friendship is not lessened by your candour. For a truth I cannot like the manner in which you live, but since one fixes no blame on the lawyer who saves the man who deserves to be hanged, and hangs the man who ought to be spared, I see no reason for being too critical upon you. Yet for all that, I wish you were of another trade, and it seems to me that the faculty

which makes you successful at the gaming-table would make you a creditable name in a higher vocation—'tis a thousand pities"—Tom paused, to muse in silence with his thumb and finger on his chin—his eyes upon the ground. Gerard seemed unwilling to influence him by a word.

"You would make an admirable general," said Tom, looking up suddenly.

"But a bad soldier."

"True, and that would hinder you from rising—even were it possible to rise—to such a rank. Your abilities would serve you as a financier, a banker."

For response, Gerard stopped by the park paling, and turning to a soot-grimed sheep browsing by the side, said:

"God made you as good as other sheep. On the downs mayhap you

would be white, certainly you would be healthier and happier, but inexorable fate brought you to London, and set you to graze on a pasture foul with soot, and mud, poor devil! and one is puzzled to know whether you were not by nature born a black sheep. I have thought of what I might have been and what I am so often and so long that I am weary of the theme."

"I don't believe in fate governing a man," said Tom, bluntly. "If a sheep had the faculties of a man he would give his master the slip and scamper back to the downs. But there is no reason because a sheep cannot behave like a man, that a man should behave like a sheep. It isn't English to be a slave without making a stout fight for liberty."

"Can you give a coward courage?" asked Gerard, quietly.

"Mr. Crewe — Gerard, I have said what I thought freely to you, for my feeling towards you is not of a lukewarm kind. 'Tis our custom to say unpleasant things to our friends, and make ourselves agreeable to those we care not two pins for. But if I said that you were cowardly, I refuse to believe that you are a coward."

"Yet I am. Not physically perhaps. I am too cold for that. I felt no more agitation in walking along this park with my seconds to meet Henry Grattan, than I feel in walking with you now. But morally, I am a poltroon, and to one of your robust constitution, that kind of feebleness will seem more despicable even than the other. I dare not face the possibilities that must attend relinquishing my present mode of existence."

"What are they?"

"The possibility of being compelled

to serve in a draper's shop—lying to sell a few yards of stuff to a suspicious woman, or to sit from morning till night at a desk in a dreary office—leading the life of a broken horse that grinds a mill and stops only to eat and to sleep. The possibility of having to eat coarse food, to wear unpleasant clothes, to live with vulgar people, to sacrifice the delicate pleasures of art, and music, and literature, to be parsimonious and niggardly, of avoiding one's creditors, of grudging half-a-crown to a servant—"

"Enough! You have said enough to convince me that a man may be as wretched with three hundred a year, as another with nothing at all."

Tom turned the conversation to a general subject which allowed him to pursue an undercurrent of thought. He was not narrow in his judgment of men.

For Gerard, he had a liking undiminished by the revelation he had chosen to make. He divided men into two classes, those who had faults and concealed them, and those who had faults and confessed them; and he preferred the latter. Nevertheless, he could not make up his mind to carry out his intention of introducing Gerard to Lady Betty. Gerard might be a gentleman, and as good as any who did not pursue his vocation, but he was a gamester, and in that very word there was something which made it distasteful to associate him with the girl he loved. Accident disposed the event, for while he was still in dubitation, they turned into the promenade, and came face to face with Mrs. St. Cyr and Lady Betty.

Mrs. St. Cyr stopped, and after a glance at Gerard Crewe, gave Tom her hand with a more gracious smile than

she had accorded him for many days, and then made a profound courtesy to the companion whom he was thus compelled to introduce.

"Our chariot wheel has broken a spoke; so we are compelled to take the air on foot," Mrs. St. Cyr, explained—"which is inconvenient, having no escort. However, I trust, Mr. Talbot, that if you and Mr. Crewe have nothing more engaging on hand, you will remedy the default."

The gentlemen replied with a suitable compliment, and the ladies resumed their walk, flanked, Mrs. St. Cyr by Tom Talbot, Lady Betty by Gerard Crewe.

Mrs. St. Cyr engaged Tom in a per-personal conversation to the end that Gerard should have the exclusive pleasure of Lady Betty's society, but this did not prevent Tom from making use of those arms which he had so recently

acquired for the purpose of winning the admiration of Lady Betty. He flourished his cane, rattled the seals at his fob, and did not forget to use his snuff-box, giving it a very pretty tap before returning it to his pocket. Mrs. St. Cyr smiled approval, and whispered low:

"Quite the *bel air*, I assure you, Mr. Talbot."

Highly flattered, Tom repeated the application, and would have had no reason to regret his elegant performance, but that Lady Betty turning towards him, put a question at the very moment when his features were paralysed by a vain effort to sneeze.

When they came to the end of the promenade and changed their positions to return, Lady Betty contrived to place her mamma next to Gerard, and to fall back in their rear with Tom.

"This is kind of you," murmured Tom, pressing the hand that Lady Betty laid on his arm to her side. "You have made me happy."

"'Tis more than you deserve. Not only would you deprive me of seeing your charming friend, but your ratan, your seals, your tobacco-box—everything that you know I adore, you conceal from me. Cruel man! If I had only seen you taking snuff before you made your proposal!— "

Tom did not reply to Lady Betty's badinage. He saw nothing to laugh at in being rejected.

CHAPTER XVIII.

SOUCI ET SANS SOUCIE.

"GERARD," said Tom, some fourteen or fifteen days after the introduction in the park, "You *must* come with me to Park Lane."

"And why must I, my dear Tom?"

"Because I have not the ingenuity and impudence to invent any further excuses for you. Every day, for the past fortnight I have been charged to bring you to dinner, to lunch, to tea, to look at the china, and what not, and

every day I have told a lie to extenuate your refusal."

"A little more practice, and you will be perfect in the art," said Gerard, laughing.

"On the contrary—I get more nervous every day, and stammer over my fabrication to such an extent, that no one could believe me. And now it is thought that I purposely keep you away from my friends—from a jealous motive."

Gerard laughed again; then grew grave. Tom continued:

"I know the delicate feeling that has kept you from the house, but you may waive all objections on that score, for this morning, failing to find any plausible pretence for your absence, I ventured to hint the truth to Mrs. St. Cyr, who no sooner heard you were a gamester than she burst out into an eulogy of gaming

and placed you on a level at once with the finest gentleman in Europe—intending that of course as a compliment to you. I assure you that instead of regarding your profession as a disadvantage, she looks upon it as the necessary qualification of a fine gentleman. Knowing what you are, she is more than ever anxious to become intimately acquainted with you."

"And you, Tom, hoping to make Lady Betty your wife—are you willing that I should associate with her?"

"There is but one answer to that," said Tom, and he held out his hand to his friend.

The following morning Gerard accompanied Tom to Park Lane, and from that time he became a frequent visitor.

He did not attempt to conceal from Tom that he visited Mrs. St. Cyr for the pleasure of Lady Betty's society; and

Tom did his best to accept his position with manful resignation—albeit that position became more difficult to sustain—his trials harder to bear each succeeding day.

The weather continuing fine, the little party walked frequently in the park, and scarcely ever without Mrs. St. Cyr adding one or two names to the rapidly increasing list of acquaintances. For Gerard was well known to the fashionable loungers there, and Mrs. St. Cyr obtained introductions to them by plain, straightforward audacity.

"Here comes the gentleman who bowed to you the day before yesterday, Mr. Crewe—I beg you will introduce me," Mrs. St. Cyr would say, and Gerard had no option but to do as was demanded of him. The audacity, however, was never resented, for the gentlemen were only too delighted to have the opportunity

of speaking to pretty Lady Betty. So the proud mother began to experience the delights she had anticipated; and on the day a real live Marquis paid a visit to them and made eyes at Lady Betty, whenever mamma pretended to look another way, she felt that her cup of mortal happiness was well nigh full.

It was only natural that Tom should sink in her estimation as others rose; indeed it may be said in her extenuation that he was less entertaining than he had been, and suffered by comparison with the fashionable young bucks who presented themselves in their most agreeable aspect.

"I protest that Mr. Talbot is getting perfectly objectionable," she said to Lady Betty. "He is always three or four days behind the fashion, and when he wears a new coat he seems ashamed of it. The first day he wore his diamond

ring he turned it round to hide the stone. He is perfectly incomprehensible! and then his face is sometimes the colour of parchment—his eyes dull—and his nose is inclined to be red. 'He cannot help that'—did you say. My love, what nonsense you talk. We are not barbarians. And what would be the use of science and discovery, if one could not remedy the defects of nature. If London does not agree with him, I wish he would go away. No, my dear, I did not say so two months ago, it is very true; but Mr. Talbot did not require change then. He was bright, and cheerful, and amiable. Now, he says nothing—or if he does it is so extremely sarcastic and unpleasant, that one wishes he would do the other thing—and whenever we have a visitor he is sullen, he scowls, and his complexion grows worse than ever. . . . .

"Well, he may do his utmost to be

agreeable—I will not contradict that—and he may be faithful and kind. I don't forget the presents he gave us on New Year's day, but he can give you nothing more before your birthday, and that is not until the autumn—as for me, one does not have birthdays at my age—and so I repeat, it would be better for him if he carried out his intention of going abroad for a time; and I do not think in speaking of him you ought to call him 'dear Tom.'

"Two or three gentlemen already have asked me what relation he is to you in consequence of your addressing him as 'Tom,' and his position here must seem altogether anomalous and unpleasant to our visitors. 'Tom' is far too familiar, and encourages the young man with hopes that are not likely to be realised; Mr. Talbot or Thomas would sound better, my love. You might suggest in

an amiable manner, of course, that a little change would do him good. . . . .

"My dear, who *does* want to discard old friends when they cease to be useful—what a preposterous idea! Not I, certainly. But I cannot consider Mr. Talbot an old friend; he is not more than three-and-thirty, and we have only known him two months or so. It is entirely for his own good that I wish him to leave us for a while—say until July—your birthday is in August. . . .

"Well, I declare, that slipped my memory—he is useful when there are four. But I object to that term 'harpooning,' sweetest. If I take Mr. Talbot's arm in order that you may walk with Mr. Crewe or another, that cannot be called harpooning. 'Tis a vulgar phrase.

"To be sure he does take the place of

a brother, and without some such kind of attendant, we could not well go about as we do, and accept attentions from gentlemen we know so slightly—there is something in that.

"And then he is liberal and suffers us to pay for nothing, and the expenses attending play-going are more than I can afford—the tradesfolk are quite irritating in their demands for payment. 'Cash will oblige,' is wrote at the foot of every bill that comes in. . . . .

"Ah, well! perhaps it will be better to say nothing to Mr. Talbot about leaving England at present. Don't laugh, my love. I am thinking how unhappy he would be to leave us."

And so poor Tom was tolerated by Mrs. St. Cyr, and permitted to make himself useful—to take a back seat in his own box—to carry the ladies' shawls

and cloaks—to escort Mrs. St. Cyr, while one more favoured, conducted Lady Betty, and to pay whenever it was possible. More than once he secretly discharged a tradesman's bill, an obligation which Mrs. St. Cyr carefully overlooked rather than to wound his feelings by acknowledgment, or to encounter Lady Betty's indignant protest.

He was not happy—far from it. It would have been well for him if he had been banished from Park Lane. A few months of travel might have restored partly his old equanimity, and indifference. But what lover ever seeks forgetfulness of his woes?

Lady Betty was familiar with him, playful with him, neglectful of him, and occasionally compassionate to him. But the girl was brimful of life and high spirits; she could not be sentimental—far less serious for more than five minutes

at a time. Lady Betty *Sans-soucie*, Tom called her. How could she be to him other than she was, being so thoughtless, so sensitive to pleasurable emotion, so delighted with variety, so intoxicated with flattery, and the glitter and excitement of the life around her?

Tom struggled gallantly through all to suppress the jealous revolt of his nature. He knew that his fault was jealousy, and he bravely set himself not to subdue the object of his jealousy, but to subdue himself; to be generous to the girl he loved, and bear his misfortunes manfully. The tear that Lady Betty one night shed for him was merited. For the successful effort of a strong man to suffer and not cry out—to put up with neglect, and conceal his sorrow is more touching than the most eloquent poetry. It is more pathetic than death itself, for is it not harder to live and endure, than

to give up one's breath and cease to suffer—to fight than to fly?

Tom was a hero—not of the perfect immaculate kind, but of the order of English gentlemen. He had faults, not a few—but his virtues outweighed them, and sent that end of the scale to kick the beam. Few of those who knew him recognised his heroic qualities. It was significant of his lovableness that his friends, at the very offset called him "Tom." There are men who are never known by their Christian name; they are to be pitied and—mistrusted.

Lady Betty admired him for his virtues—his strength and honesty—and loved him for his faults—and they formed the larger constituent in the sum of qualities for which she valued him. It was a fault to be jealous—a fault to submit to her neglect, a fault to forgive the slights she put upon him, a fault to

patiently follow her in the path which was all rose petals for her, all thorns for him, a fault to submit to the selfish tyranny of mamma—but did not each of these faults carry a proof of his love for her that was wanting in all the compliment and flattery of the brilliant train of her admirers?

CHAPTER XIX.

THE INVITATION.

ONE afternoon in the beginning of April, Tom arrived at the house in Park Lane, carrying two bouquets. He had engaged a box at the opera, and the bouquets were for Lady Betty and Mrs. St. Cyr. Lady Betty was always grateful for flowers, and never failed to reward her lover for a bouquet with five minutes' sweetness; and so expectant of happiness, Tom ran up-stairs, and entered the drawing-room with a light foot and a cheerful face.

Gerard Crewe was sitting with the ladies, who were talking with much excitement.

"Oh, Tom! what *do* you think?" exclaimed Lady Betty, springing up from her seat and clapping her hands, as he entered.

"Not the slightest idea," answered Tom, standing still with the bouquets in his hands.

"Why, Mr. Crewe has obtained invitations for us from Mrs. Walker, for her mask ball."

Tom turned to a side-table and laid down the bouquets, conscious that they could claim no attention in the presence of this strong centre attraction—in fact he received never a word of thanks for them—saying as he did so:

"Gerard is fortunate."

"An invitation for Lady Betty and me," said Mrs. St. Cyr, in order that

Tom should at once understand that he was not included.

"I am sorry I could not get one for you also, Tom," said Gerard. "But you know how difficult they are to procure for Mrs. Walker's entertainments at all times, and this is to be especially brilliant," said Gerard.

"The Prince of Wales is to be there, and the Marchioness of Donegal, and Mrs. Fitz-Herbert," said Mrs. St. Cyr impressively.

"You are going, of course," said Tom to Gerard.

"Yes. The ladies will go under my protection, and be introduced by me."

Tom seated himself, and said quietly, raising his eyes to Lady Betty:

"I hope you will enjoy yourself very much."

He found that she had become suddenly grave. In her own delight she

had not thought how the prospect of her going to a ball without him would affect him. There was regret in her eyes as she looked at him, and she said with tender earnestness, taking a chair close beside him:

"I am so sorry that you are not going with me, Tom," and she just touched his hand as it rested on the arm of his chair.

His face lit up with gratitude in the moment, and he murmured a few words which were unintelligible to every ear but Lady Betty's. A vocabulary of three words is sufficient for lovers.

Mrs. St. Cyr was already discussing the great question of dress, in which Lady Betty quickly joined, and in the course of the next half hour the relative merits of every costume in Europe, Asia, and the northern part of Africa

were argued *pro* and *con*. A temporary diversion was caused by the announcement of dinner, when Mrs. St. Cyr rose promptly and took possession of Tom's arm, while Gerard of necessity followed with Lady Betty.

The conversation was renewed as soon as the party were seated at table, and continued with such vivacity, that it was late when the ladies were ready to go to the theatre; nevertheless Mrs. St. Cyr ordered her coachman to drive round by Stanhope Street in order that they might see Mrs. Walker's house, which stood at the corner, and which was to be thrown open for the reception of masks on the first Monday in June.

The performance had commenced when Mrs. St. Cyr, in a gorgeous turban with nodding plumes, took her place in the front of the box with Lady Betty.

"I declare the Prince is in the Royal box," said Mrs. St. Cyr, in an excited whisper; "and there is Mrs. Fitz-Herbert, and who is that very distinguished-looking gentleman with him, Mr. Crewe?"

"My Lord Castlereigh," answered Gerard.

Tom was disposing of the ladies' mantles at the back of the box.

"Bring your chair between us, Mr. Crewe," said Mrs. St. Cyr. "Be careful of my fur if you please, Mr. Talbot. How charming the Prince looks—what a *dear* man! and to think we shall have the felicity of seeing him dance. I am told he performs both the Irish and Scotch steps to a marvel. My darling, look straight before you, and keep perfectly still. The Prince has his spy-glass up, and is looking at you. Oh, I feel all of a flutter—my scent-bottle

if you please, Mr. Talbot. There's a gentleman in the box on the right looking straight across at you, my love—who can he be? My spy-glass if you please, Mr. Talbot. There's Lord Forsith bowing.

"My love, your front tuft wants a touch on the right. The Prince is looking again. Ah, there's the Marquis Dolgelly in the omnibus wanting to bow. My bouquet if you please, Mr. Talbot. Here's all the rank and fashion to be sure. What a charming opera! I never enjoyed one so much in my life. The Prince can't keep his eyes off you, I protest. Oh, I adore the opera—such sentiment, such—what is it all about, Mr Talbot? you understand the Italian."

In this manner Mrs. St. Cyr gave herself up to the delights of music, and continued to chat in a tone suffi-

ciently loud to prevent anyone in the box following a bar of melody until a tap at the door of the box announced visitors, and Tom, in his customary function of useful friend, opened the door and admitted three gentlemen who had come to pay their respects to Lady Betty. When they left, Gerard rose and withdrew, giving his chair to Tom, with a significant look of sympathy.

"I hope you are enjoying the music," whispered Tom to Lady Betty.

"To tell you the truth, I have heard nothing but mamma's voice yet awhile," said she.

"My darling, the Prince has his spy-glass up again. Mr. Talbot, will you see if the door is closed."

"The door is perfectly fast, madam," answered Tom, tartly, without moving,

and glaring across the house at the Prince.

"What an air the Prince has," exclaimed Mrs. St. Cyr.

"Yes, and a very unpleasant air for a man who has a suffering wife, and should set an example of fidelity and honour to the people he is to govern."

"Mr. Talbot! I beg you will not intrude your republican notions here. There are circumstances in connection with that unfortunate marriage which should be hushed up and concealed."

"I am precisely of your opinion, Mrs. St. Cyr," answered Tom, still scowling at the Prince, who was now toying with Mrs. FitzHerbert's glove.

Further discussion was precluded by the fresh arrival of visitors, who occupying the front of the box, left Tom at

liberty to amuse himself with his own reflections at the back.

It was useless endeavouring to overcome the discontent which agitated him now. He fancied that he was justified in regarding the course of events with mistrust and suspicion. It was not the laughter of Lady Betty listening to the wit of her admirers that agitated him, but the frequent observation cast upon her by the finest gentleman and the greatest libertine in Europe. He could not contemplate with composure the prospect of Lady Betty meeting the Prince at the mask-ball. He knew the license accorded to those wearing masks, and his jealous love for Lady Betty stimulated his imagination to conceive as probable a thousand impossible accidents which might happen to her, and what protection would the giddy young girl have in her foolish

mother? worse than none. When the Prince again took up his opera-glass, Tom, tormented to a degree bordering on desperation, quitted the box hurriedly, unable to stand there and see the privileged rake fix his greedy eyes upon Lady Betty.

He was walking in the corridor, with his eyes on the ground, completely unconscious of the people he met and passed, when Gerard came to his side.

"What on earth is the matter, Tom? Your face is the colour of ash, and and your hand is cold as ice. Come and take some cognac," said he.

"Cognac will do me no good. Never mind me, Gerard, go to the ladies."

"Are they alone?"

"No, there are three chattering idiots to amuse them."

"What is the matter?" Gerard repeated, quietly. "Out with it, Tom; you're not jealous of idiots?"

"Gerard, can anything be done to prevent Lady Betty meeting the Prince of Wales at Mrs. Walker's mask-ball?"

Gerard was silent a minute, less astonished by his disease—for he had seen for some time what was going on in his friend's mind—than perplexed as to the remedy to be given.

"Yes," he said, "the actual cards of admission are not yet in my possession; I will tear them up when I get them, if you will. But first of all you shall come with me into the air, you shiver as if you had an ague upon you. Wait here a moment."

Gerard left his side, and Tom advanced to an open door, from which he commanded a view of the boxes

on either side of the house. Lady Betty was looking through her glasses, and it seemed to him that she was looking at the Prince, which was not improbable. The Prince was looking on the stage, for a wonder, but that did not greatly lessen Tom's perturbation: it was enough that Lady Betty's glass was fixed on him.

"Come," said Gerard, "here is your hat; put it on. I have told Parkes to wait in the box until you return. Now, Tom, let us talk of this affair seriously. Do you actually wish that Lady Betty shall not go to this ball?"

"I cannot bear the thought of that libertine approaching her. He has been looking at her ever since she entered the box, and she at him."

"What is more natural? She is the prettiest woman in the house, and

he the prettiest gentleman, as the phrase goes. What then? I do not wish to defend the Prince's character, but I ask you, is he worse because his faults are public, than dozens of the men who can keep their faults secret, and must be met in any ball-room or assembly? Look at the possibilities of the case from the most extreme point of view. Supposing the Prince dances with Miss St. Cyr—which is one of the most improbable things I can imagine, will she in consequence love you less, or be less worthy of your love? If she deserves your love she will always be loyal to you, but any restriction you put upon her actions must lessen her esteem for you, and so shake her loyalty."

They had entered a tavern close by the theatre, and there Tom sat in apathetic silence, while Gerard used

argument to bring him to reason. At length he shook off the mood, and rousing himself, said:

"Say no more, Gerard; my prejudice is not to be cured by appeals to my reason, for that is paralysed by these paroxysms of jealousy. My own conscience accuses and condemns me of something worse than folly. When the fit is upon me I am the slave of my evil passion, a slave meaner to my own perception, perhaps, than to yours. Let us return to the theatre; see, my hand is firm again. The madman has his lucid intervals. Nothing shall hinder Lady Betty following her own inclinations, while they are harmless to herself."

"Unhappily," said Gerard, laying his hand on Tom's shoulder, "you are not always capable of judging whether they are harmless or not."

"Then you shall be my guide, Gerard. When I am in doubt I will come to you."

Gerard pressed his friend's hand encouragingly, but he said to himself:

"My poor Tom! when can you be in doubt? 'Trifles light as air are to the jealous confirmation strong as proofs of holy writ.'"

CHAPTER XX.

WHO SHOULD WEAR A DIADEM BUT SHE?

THE forthcoming ball was the sole topic of conversation at Park Lane. Every visitor was taken into Mrs. St. Cyr's confidence, his advice accepted with unequivocal expressions of approval, and discarded the moment a fresh proposition was advanced. The house was littered from the lumber-room to the kitchen fire-place with plates of fashions and "elegant designs." It was noticeable

that each new adviser attempted to out-do his predecessor by the gorgeousness of his fancy, and that as the ornaments proposed advanced from beads and paste to pearls and diamonds, Mrs. St. Cyr grew more thoughtful and dissatisfied.

However, at the end of a week the dressmaker pointed out the necessity of an immediate decision, and then in a grand final consultation it was agreed to adopt Gerard's suggestion, that Mrs. St. Cyr should represent Night, and Lady Betty Morning. The great recommendation of this dress to Mrs. St. Cyr seemed to be that she could wear her plume of feathers, which might be dyed for the occasion at a trifling expense.

The dressmaker made her calculations, and speedily furnished Mrs. St. Cyr with a list of the materials —

silk, satin, muslin, fine crape, sprigs of flowers and diamonds—which she must be supplied within a couple of days.

Mrs. St. Cyr took the list, and having jotted down the possible cost of each article, and summed them up in a grand total, she hurried up to her bed-room, had an attack of the palpitations, and could speak to no one for the rest of the day.

The next morning when Tom called to inquire after her health, he found Mrs. St. Cyr alone in the drawing-room. She rose from her seat and greeted him with effusive warmth.

"I knew you would be the first to call upon me after my indisposition," she said. "You are ever so thoughtful, and considerate and kind; and I have sent Lady Betty into the sitting-room because I wished to have you

all to myself for five minutes. It is so seldom now that I can have the pleasure of a little confidential conversation with a real friend. One's time is so occupied by visitors, acquaintances with whom one can have no sympathy whatever. We have quite decided about the dresses for the ball; Lady Betty is to wear a skirt of pink and saffron, covered with fine muslin looped up with sprigs of flower-buds studded with diamonds—Morning, you know. The pink and yellow sky with fleecy clouds, and opening flowers sprinkled with dew, is the fancy."

"A poetical and pretty fancy."

"Nothing to be compared with your idea, Mr. Talbot; but still Lady Betty is imperious, as you know. I shall wear a simple robe of the dark ultramarine spangled with stars, a plume

fastened with a crescent, a wreath of poppies, a dark veil gathered in with a spray of paste to represent a comet," she paused for a moment and then recommenced. "You have noticed, I have no doubt, with some surprise, that I have been ill at ease for the past few days, Mr. Talbot, have you not?"

"Nothing to excite surprise, madam, considering how much you have had to think on."

"I have had something to agitate me, which I was bound to conceal even from my own daughter, but I should feel myself wanting in gratitude if I made any reservation from you, who have always manifested such friendship for us."

"I assure you I have no curiosity," said Tom, eagerly; "I beg you not to open any subject painful to yourself."

"But I want your advice, my dear Mr. Talbot."

"If I can be of any help to you the case is altered."

"It is your advice only that I ask for, but I must beg as a favour that you will not mention a word of what I say to Lady Betty—she would never forgive me. You know how proud she is, and would I am sure refuse to let me accept any—any advice you may give me."

Tom bowed acquiescence, and Mrs. St. Cyr proceeded.

"My property is so bound up that I can draw only two hundred pounds a quarter for my requirements. My expenses in London exceed my expectations, and the tradesmen demand cash payments, as we are only recently established here. To satisfy their claims I had spent nearly all of the money

I received at the spring quarter before we received the invitation to Mrs. Walker's ball, and I find myself with no more than sufficient to supply our absolute necessities. In this extremity I wrote to Dr. Blandly begging him to let me have a quarter's payment in advance. He refused. I then wrote asking if he would grant me a loan, taking as security a written instrument empowering him to appropriate my furniture and china at my death. Again he politely but firmly refused to assist me."

"Mrs. St. Cyr," said Tom, greatly embarrassed, "I beg you will not enter into these details. You may spare yourself and me unnecessary pain by telling me at once what assistance you require."

"My dear Mr. Talbot, you know all, and all I ask of you is—what am I to do?"

"Will you tell me how much the costumes will cost?"

Mrs. St. Cyr hesitated a moment, afraid to mention the grand total, and then for answer took from her pocket the piece of paper on which she had made her calculations and handed it to him to read. Without looking at it he slipped it into his pocket and merely said:

"I am going in the City now; I shall return in two hours, when I hope to be able to allay your anxiety."

Mrs. St. Cyr accompanied him to the door with a thousand broken sentences of protest, of gratitude, and apology, and finished, as he hastily withdrew, with a deep sigh—partly of satisfaction, partly of regret.

"Had I only known beforehand," she murmured, "I should certainly not have

put down everything at the lowest possible price, nor should I have sent that plume to the dyer's."

That was not the only error she had committed, for when Tom came to open the piece of paper on which Mrs. St. Cyr had written her estimate, he read, in the bold, legible hand of Doctor Blandly, these words:

"Madam,

"I decline to accept your proposal, which I consider both senseless and wicked.

"Your servant,

"BLANDLY."

This was the polite refusal referred to by Mrs. St. Cyr.

At Lincoln's Inn Tom procured notes sufficient to cover the requirements of Mrs. St. Cyr, and from thence he went

into Cheapside and gave orders to a jeweller's to make a coronet of stones to represent an aurora.

"There's not a gem will sparkle like my Lady Betty's eyes when she sees my present," he said to himself as he left the shop; and indulging his fancy with a picture of Lady Betty in her happiness, he stepped along lightly. He had a habit of repeating a phrase again and again as he walked, while his thoughts played about a central object, and these were the words he said to himself as he trudged from St. Paul's to Piccadilly:

"Who should wear a diadem but she?"

At the corner of Park Lane he stopped beside a butcher, who was gazing at an approaching party of equestrians—two gentlemen and a lady, with servants in their rear. The lady was Lady Betty,

the gentlemen fashionable acquaintances who, in their visits, treated Tom with tacit contempt.

Lady Betty was laughing, the young bucks were simpering. They did not see Tom; he was unnoticeable enough standing there in his plain dress beside the butcher. They passed him, turned the corner, and went off in a canter at Lady Betty's command. Tom heard her voice.

He watched until her pretty figure was lost to his sight, and then he turned away with a sigh, walking now with heavy steps and a heavy heart to the house where he had hoped to find her and catch a smile.

"They will be at the ball, perhaps; and maybe now they are arranging to dance with her," he said to himself.

It occurred to him that if he chose

to withhold the notes he carried in his pocket, she could not go to the ball and dance with his rivals. But his better genius ruled his heart that morning, and Mrs. St. Cyr got the notes.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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